

May
2017

ANIMATION

MAGAZINE

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Animation at **CANNES**

*My Entire High School
Sinking into the Sea*

Archer Dreamland

PLUS

Blue-Zoo's charming
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The feral VFX of *Logan*

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The Fate of the Furious

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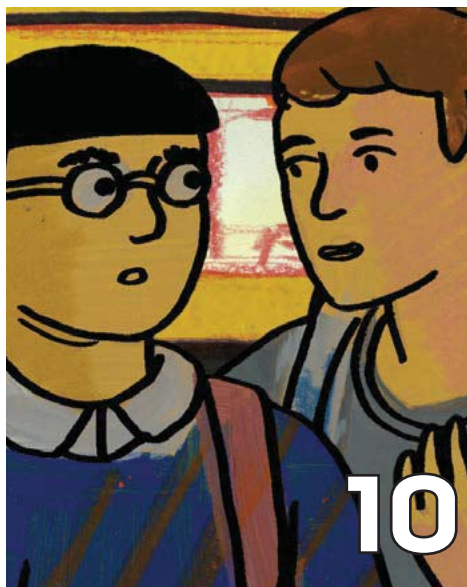
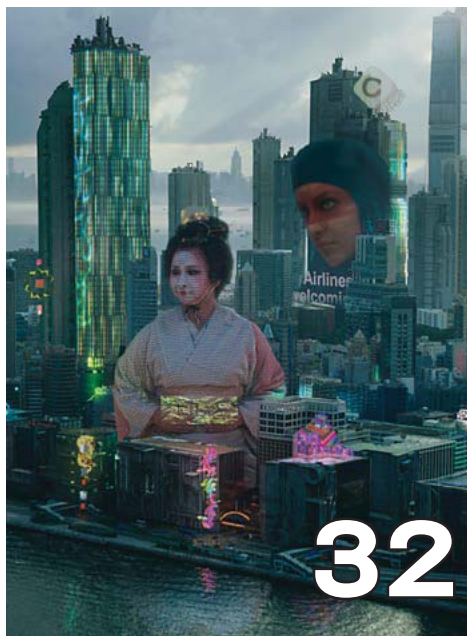
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On the Cover: Scarlett Johansson reimagines the Major in *Ghost in the Shell*.

Cannes Edition: Redrover-ToonBox's *The Nut Job 2*, in theaters Aug. 18.

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It's all personal

Editing *Animation Magazine* is a job that offers plenty of surprises, and this issue is full of interesting and often personal connections.

Take this issue's feature story on the new GKIDS release, *My Entire High School Sinking into the Sea*. It's directed by Dash Shaw, a noted comic-book artist I recall interviewing about a decade ago about his innovative online comics work. I was relating this during a class I'm taking

on creating comic books, only to have the instructor say that in his editor days he gave Shaw some of his first comics work. Conversation then turned to the new *Teen Titans: The Judas Contract* original animated movie (head to www.animationmagazine.net to read a chat about that one with director Sam Liu), adapting one of the all-time great comics stories of the 1980s. My very positive evaluation of it got everyone in the room as excited to see that movie as they are to check out Shaw's indie delight.

Then there's our feature on the Nick Jr. series, *Digby Dragon*, made by the fine folks at Blue-Zoo in London. It's a series my 5-year-old daughter turned me on to, and I found the animation to be so compelling, the stories so fun and the characters so charming that I had to commission a feature on it. U.K.-based writer Karen Yossman – who recently became a mom – was eager to tackle the story and, I think, did a bang-up job.

Another writer, my longtime colleague and friend Karen Idelson, was just as eager to delve into the visual effects of *The Fate of the Furious*, being a huge fan who's seen every movie in the series multiple times. She also delved into the visual effects on *Logan*, a movie I found tremendously entertaining and thought-provoking.

And then there's our cover story on *Ghost in the Shell*. Putting this movie on the cover was a no-brainer for me. Not only is it adapting a classic, much-loved and thoroughly excellent anime, it's doing so with all the panache modern visual effects can bring to it. Seeing an animated icon adapted in this fashion shows how much anime (and all animation) is becoming an essential part of the global culture. Plus, it's a real kick to see a new take on something as classic as *Ghost in the Shell*.

That passion extends beyond the creative, as we look at animation's growing presence at Cannes by profiling the three shorts selected for the world's most prestigious film competition, and the excellent guerrilla efforts to promote animation at the festival by the organizers of Animation Day in Cannes. On the business end, we get into global strategy with Pierre Sissmann of Cyber Group Studios – his insights are worth reading for anyone working in the field.

On the anniversary front, next issue is our 30th anniversary issue – and it's going to be big. Plus, we've got the World Animation Celebration returning in the fall at Sony Pictures Animation, our sixth annual World Animation and VFX Summit, and plenty more surprises in store.

In all, it's a bright, bright future and I can't wait to see what it brings.

Until next issue,

Tom

Tom McLean
Editor
tom@animationmagazine.net

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

'It's not only the No. 1 film event with a great competition, it's also a place where 5,000 media are attending, and they all are looking for nice things to write about and report. If you have a good story, a good product, a good idea, then it can hit really worldwide.'

— Bruno Chatelin,

Co-founder of filmfestivals.com and partner/organizer for Animation Day in Cannes



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News & Notes



Jedi Unleashed

Disney officially kicked off the countdown to *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* by releasing a trailer and poster for the Dec. 15 feature during Star Wars Celebration, held April 13-16 in Orlando, Fla. Other news out of the show included a trailer for the fourth and final season of the Disney XD animated series *Star Wars Rebels* as well as a micro-series of animated shorts called *Star Wars: Forces of Destiny*, which will debut online in July and spotlight key characters including Rey, Jyn Erso, Sabine Wren, Princess Leia and Ahsoka Tano.

FESTS AND EVENTS

World Animation Celebration Returns to Sony Lot in 2017

Animation Libation Studios and *Animation Magazine* will again present The World Animation Celebration in 2017. Hosted by Sony Pictures Animation, the international animated short film festival will take place Sept. 30 and Oct. 1 at the studio, located in Culver City, Calif.

The two-day event will showcase the best in traditional, CG, digital, stop-motion, experimental and VR animation from filmmakers and students around the world, which will be reviewed by a panel of world-class professionals as judges.

In addition to the film program, attendees will be able to take in industry panels, guest speakers and artist demos, meet with recruiters and school representatives, and participate in portfolio reviews.

Film submission and early-bird registration information will be announced soon.

Bookmark WorldAnimationCelebration.com for updates.

SCHOOLS

Reel FX, Moonbot Creatives Launch Flight School

Reel FX studio's VR/AR division and the creative leadership of Moonbot Studios have joined forces to form a new multiplatform content studio, dubbed Flight School.

The operation is opening in Dallas with a 30-odd person team of creatives, tech masters and designers.

Flight School's first project will be the "mysterious and emotional" *Manifest 99*, an interactive narrative VR experience due out this summer.

The new shop will be lead by Academy Award-winning Chief Creative Officer, Brandon Oldenburg (*The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore*), and Emmy Award-winning Executive Creative Director, Limbert Fabian (*Silent*, *The Scarecrow*).

Flight School will be managed by CEO Kyle Clark (current co-CEO of Reel FX) and Executive Vice President, Lampton Enochs (former CEO of Moonbot).

EVENTS

Cartoons on the Bay 2017 Pulcinella Award Winners

Italian animation confab Cartoons on the Bay wrapped up its 2017 edition in Turin with the Pucinelina Awards gala, capping three days of screenings, master classes and networking.

This year's event included a focus on Japanese animation.

The winners are:

Best Preschool TV Series: *YoYo* (Rai Fiction, Show Lab, Grid Animation, Telegael; Italy/Ireland)

Best Kids TV Series: *OddBods* (One Animation; Singapore)

Best Teen TV Series: *Ant Gets Married* (Animoon; Poland)

Best Interactive Media: *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo; Japan)

Best Live Action/Hybrid TV Series: *Big World of Little Worries* (Vivement Lundi; France)

Best TV Pilot: *Selfie* (Savoir-Fer; France)

Best Short Film: *Ariadne's Thread*. Directed by Claude Luyet (Studio GDS, Luyet; Switzerland)

Best Animated Feature Film: *Iqbal: Tale of a Fearless Child*. Directed by Michel Fuzellier & Babak Payami (Gertie, 2d3D, Montparnasse; Italy/France)

FESTS AND EVENTS

Annecy Animation du Monde Program Allies with Africa

The vigorously developing African animation industry has opened another international avenue with the latest MIFA Animation du Monde initiative.

The program will promote "animation without borders" with a first-ever pan-African pitching competition, organized by the Annecy International Animated Film Festival & Market, the African Animation Network and DISCOP.

Dubbed "Annecy – MIFA Pitches Animation du Monde," the African initiative will comprise two semi-final rounds, coinciding with DISCOP Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire (May 30-June 1) and DISCOP Johannesburg in South Africa (Oct. 25-27). Both events will turn out six projects, with all 12 competing in the Grand Finale at DISCOP Johannesburg for two finalist spots. The top two project creators will receive automatic entry into Animation du Monde 2018 at Annecy, including accommodation and MIFA accreditations.

Projects can be registered for the first round at DISCOP Abidjan through discopafrica.com through May 9.

FESTS AND EVENTS

DreamWorks Earns 21 Daytime Emmys Noms

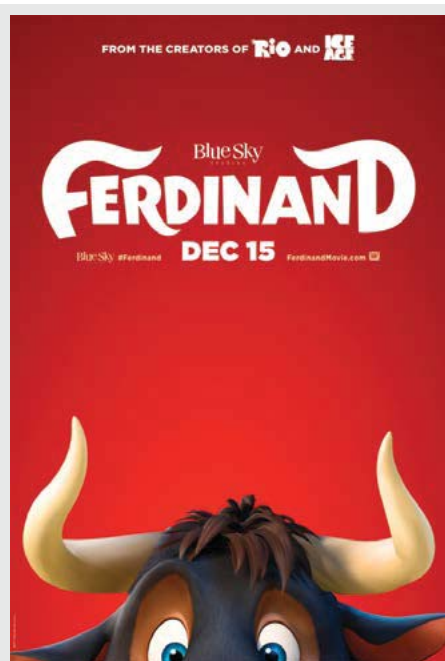
The nominations are in for the 2017 Daytime Emmy Awards, and DreamWorks Animation has emerged as the top toon producer with 21 nods. This includes seven for Guillermo del Toro's *Trollhunters* (the most of any animated program), on top of the two Individual Achievement awards already announced.

Amazon's *The Snowy Day* and *Lost in Oz* both garnered five nominations, while the four-nod club includes DWA's *All Hail King Julien*, Disney's *LEGO Star Wars: The Freemaker Adventures* and Amazon's *Tumble Leaf*.

The Academy of Television Arts and Sciences will present the 44th Daytime Emmy Awards at the Pasadena Civic Auditorium on April 30.

In Brief

U.S. film and TV producer **Skydance Media** has launched an animation division and multiyear partnership with Madrid-based **Ilion Animation Studios** (*Mortadelo & Filemon*, *Planet*



One Sweet Bull

Blue Sky Studios and 20th Century Fox unveiled the first look at the upcoming animated feature adaptation of *Ferdinand*, directed by Carlos Saldanha (*Rio*) and due Dec. 15. The voice cast includes John Cena, Kate McKinnon and Gina Rodriguez.

51) to develop and produce animated features and series. ... **ASIFA-Hollywood's Animation Educators Forum** awarded its first Faculty Grants to Owen Klatte of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Dave Mauriello of Drexel University. ... The Portland Art Museum and its Northwest Film Center will present *Animating Life: The Art, Science, and Wonder of LAIKA* Oct. 14 through May 20, 2018. ... **MONDO** has picked up exclusive, worldwide English-language television rights to the comics-inspired animated series *LastMan* for its VRV channel in the U.S., and will follow up with launches in other English-language territories. ... **Nickelodeon** will be bringing back everyone's favorite megalomaniacal alien with an all-new, 90-minute *Invader Zim* TV movie from original series creator Jhonen Vasquez. ... **Annapurna TV** is developing a new adult-targeted, CG-animated series titled *Amberville* at **Amazon Studios**, for Amazon Prime Video. Created by Chris McCoy and Conrad Vernon (*Sausage Party*), the dark comedy series is based on the "Mollisan Town" book series by Tim Davys, published by HarperCollins. ... **LAIKA** has named **Striker Entertainment** its worldwide licensing agent, tasked with developing a global program with best-in-class partners for its film catalog. ... Finn and Jake's return to the land of Ooo will unfurl in an eight-part, four-night special

event as **Adventure Time: Elements**, starting April 24. ... **Netflix** is financing *America: The Motion Picture*, an R-rated animated adventure through revisionist history. ... **Adult Swim** has given the green light to two new action-driven animated series set to premiere later this year: *Apollo Gauntlet* from MONDO's animation studio **Six Point Harness** and **Mosaic**; and *Hot Streets* from **Stoopid Buddy Stoodios**. ... *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* is getting the animated feature treatment with the help of Elton John. The movie will be released under the **STX Family** label and is being produced by John's **Rocket Pictures** (*Gnomeo & Juliet*, *Sherlock Gnomes*) in association with Really Useful Group. ... **DreamWorks Animation** has secured the rights to award-winning, internationally bestselling author Cressida Cowell's upcoming fantasy novel series *The Wizards of Once*. ... Disney has a title and date for **Ralph Breaks the Internet: Wreck-It Ralph 2**, coming to theaters March 9, 2018.

People

Japanese powerhouse Production I.G promoted **Maki Terashima-Furuta** to President of the company. She previously served as Vice President since founding Production I.G's U.S. subsidiary in 1997. ... Design and media studio Super 78 has added Pixar, Sony and Paramount veteran **Paul Washburn** as Head of Production and Producer. ... Bento Box Entertainment (*Bob's Burgers*, *Legends of Chamberlain Heights*) has tapped **Ben Jones** as its new Creative Director. ... Visual effects house Zoic Studios has promoted Emmy-nominated VFX supervisor **Jeffrey Baksinski** to Creative Director. ... **Gina Rodriguez**, the Golden Globe-winning star of hit series *Jane the Virgin*, has signed on to voice iconic crook Carmen Sandiego in Netflix's upcoming animated reboot. ... Canadian studio Bron Animation has signed **Ricky Gervais** (*Special Correspondents*, *The Office*, *Derek*) to narrate its adaptation of *The Willoughbys*, based on Newberry Award-winning author Lois Lowry's popular kids' book. ... Framestore has appointed **Kate Phillips** as Head of Production, Montreal. ... New York and San Francisco-based content creation and production company BODEGA has launched a new animation division under the leadership of executive producer **Bill Hewes**, who brings over two decades of producing experience spanning animation, live action, VFX and design to the post.

Passings

Joe Harris, the advertising artist who brought to life the cereal-sneaking Trix Rabbit, and *The Underdog Show*, died March 26 at his home in Stamford, Conn. He was 89.

Stuff We Love

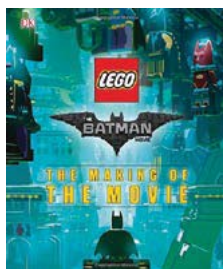
READ ME:

The LEGO Batman Movie:

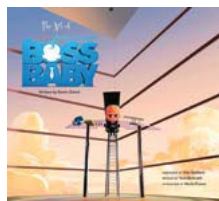
The Making of the Movie

By Tracey Miller-Zarneke [DK, \$24.99]

A comprehensive guide to the design and building of the minifigs, vehicles and bricktastic world animated by Animal Logic.



The Art of The Boss Baby



By Ramin Zahed, preface by Tom McGrath, foreword by Alec Baldwin, afterword by Marla Frazee [Insight Editions, \$45]

Take a chair on the board of Baby Corp. for a lushly illustrated insider's look at how the storybook tot got a feature promotion from DreamWorks.

The Art of Smurfs: The Lost Village

By Tracey Miller-Zarneke, foreword by Veronique Culliford [Cameron + Company, \$45]

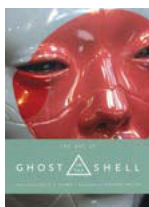
Hundreds of storyboards, character designs and concept pieces bring Peyo's colorful characters (and their new friends from Sony) to life.



The Art of Ghost in the Shell

By David S. Cohen, foreword by Richard Taylor [Insight Editions, \$45]

Besides the whitewashing controversy, Rupert Sanders' adaptation created a jaw-dropping futuristic world of giant holograms, robotic geisha and insane bionics – pure digital artistry.



OTOMO: A Global Tribute to the Mind Behind Akira

[Kodansha Comics, \$29.99]

Originally assembled as an Angoulême comics fest exclusive in 2015, this 168-page hardcover featuring works by 80-plus illustrators and comickers (in full color!) has been reissued with a new cover by Katsuhiro Otomo in honor of *Akira*'s 35th anniversary.



GET IN THE GROOVE:

The Bob's Burgers Music Album Deluxe Box Set

[Sub Pop, \$69; out May 12]

Alright! Need a little spice in your life? Of course you do. So move your buns and go pre-order this 107-song collection from Loren Bouchard's Emmy-winning series, performed by voice stars H. Jon Benjamin, John Roberts, Dan Mintz, Eugene Mirman and Kristen Schaal, as well as special guests like Aziz Ansari, Sarah Silverman, Zach Galifianakis, Cyndi Lauper and Carly Simon. Plus! "Bob's Buskers" versions from musical luminaries St. Vincent, The National, Stephin Merritt and more.



The limited edition deluxe set includes three LPs plus a 7-inch record on "condiment-colored" vinyl, a hardbound lyrics book, sheet-music songbook, three original posters, stickers and a patch. If you're working with a musician's budget, opt for the standard version (two CDs, three LPs and a 7-inch), the CD set or digital option. All are available through megamart.subpop.com.

HEY, BIG SPENDER:

Zac Posen "Betty Boop" Dress & Gown

[ZAC, \$250 & \$550]

Max Fleischer's iconic cartoon flapper was the inspiration for these vivacious frocks in "Betty Boop Red" – painstakingly researched and crafted by King Features, Fleischer Studios and Pantone. Both the flirty spring dress and knock-out gown feature playful lipstick print details at the neckline, capturing Betty's forever-young spirit. The line (available at zacposen.com) launched at Valentine's Day with a new cartoon animated by Titmouse, which you can watch at bettyboop.com.



THE TOYBOX:

Funko – Rick and Morty

These are a couple gems from the line, which also includes Mystery Minis (\$3.99), plushes (\$9.99), and 5-inch action figures (\$12.99, out in May).

Pocket Pop! Keychains

[\$5.99 ea.]

Available in Rick, Morty and Mr. Meeseeks models.



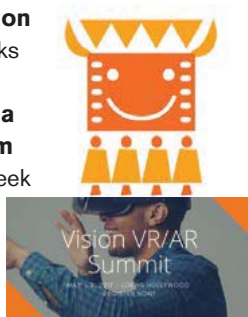
Pop! Vinyl Figures [\$9.99 ea.]

New characters: Weaponized Rick, Weaponized Morty, Mr. Meeseeks, Mr. Poopy Butthole, Bird Person, Squanchy and Snowball. 🐾

--Mercedes Milligan

May Planner

1 The two-day **Vision VR/AR Summit** kicks off in L.A., while the **Golden Kukul-Sofia Int'l Animation Film Festival** begins a week of screenings in Sofia, Bulgaria. [visionsummit2017.com | 2017.animationfest-bg.eu]



9 Discover next-level strategies at **Cartoon Business** in Belfast or take in sun and screenings at Santiago's **Chilemonos** animation festival. [cartoon-media.eu | chilemonos.com]



19 Ridley Scott's **Alien: Covenant** hatches in theaters.

2 Germany is the place to be this week for the **Stuttgart Int'l Animation Festival, FMX** and **Animation Production Day** – all in the same metro. [itfs.de | fmx.de | animationproductionday.de]



Meanwhile, Trebon, Czech Rep., hosts **Visegrad Animation Forum** and the **AniFilm Festival** [visegradanimation.com | anifilm.cz]

10 **Northwest Animation Festival** brings international gems to Portland, Ore., this week, with a second run May 19-21 in Eugene, Ore. [nwanimationfest.com]



11 Beginning today are **Trollywood Animation Festival** in Trollhattan, Sweden, and **World VR Forum** in Crans-Montana, Switzerland. [trolleywoodanimation.se | worldvrforum.com]



26 Cap'n Jack faces a terrifying new foe in **Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales**.



5 Baby Groot returns with the rest of the crew in Marvel's **Guardians of the Galaxy, Vol 2**. The School of Visual Arts in NYC presents the **Dusty Film & Animation Festival**. [dusty.sva.edu]



17 The stars come out for the **Festival de Cannes & Marché du Film** in France. [festival-cannes.fr | marche-dufilm.com]



29 Explore the digital frontiers of animated content for three days in Barcelona at **Cartoon 360**. [cartoon-media.eu]



30 The 8th annual **VAFI Int'l Children & Youth Animation Film Festival** takes place in Varaždin, Croatia, this week. [vafi.hr/en]



To get your company's events and products listed in this monthly calendar, please e-mail mercedes@animationmagazine.net.

Growing a Flame

Indie feature *Spark: A Space Tail* makes the most of its \$15 million budget to entertain kids with a rousing CG space adventure. By Tom McLean.

Spark: *A Space Tail* aspires to something few animated features these days will admit to: It's an animated movie squarely aimed at entertaining children.

"There's a sort of purity to animation," says the feature's writer-director Aaron Woodley, "where you're really trying to lock into an emotional narrative line for children ... breaking things down into that childlike mode of storytelling and imagination, and that's really what I was trying to do."

Released April 14 in the United States via Open Road Films, the CG animated sci-fi adventure movie is a Canadian-Korean co-production between ToonBox Entertainment, Redrover Co. Ltd., Shanghai Hoongman Technology Co. Ltd. and Gulfstream Pictures. Double Dutch International is handling the Canadian distribution as well as international sales, excluding China and Korea.

The movie follows the story of Spark (Jace Norman), a teenage monkey who lives in a galactic junkyard with his pals Vix (Jessica Biel) and Chunk (Rob deLeeuw), and discovers his true identity to be the key to taking back the planet Bana from the evil King Zhong (Alan C. Peterson).

Woodley has a broad background that includes stop-motion animation work on shorts and the series *Glenn Martin, DDS*. He's also



Aaron Woodley

directed live-action features and TV, giving him the kind of broad experience the co-production was

seeking when they hired him in 2011.

"They had a script and it was loosely based on *Journey to the West*, which is an ancient Chinese text," he says. Coming aboard to rewrite the script, Woodley stepped into the director's slot on what was his first experience with CG animation. And with a budget of \$15 million, there were plenty of challenges to overcome.


"Creatively, there's not a whole lot of difference between making a live-action film, making an animated film, making a stop-motion film or a CG film," he says. "It was really trying to learn how to harness these tools, these highly technological tools, to do that."

Most of the work on the movie was done at ToonBox's studio in Toronto, with about 30 percent of the animation done in Korea, Woodley says.

Typical of the movie's challenges was the need to animate a character named The Captain before an actor was cast in the role. When Patrick Stewart took the role, he impressed the entire crew by rising to the challenge of delivering a performance that synched up with the animation and was affecting and fresh.

"I thought possibly he would walk away from the project, but he didn't," says Woodley. "Not only did he nail the synch – in one or two takes maximum – but he actually made the synch better, which I think is astounding."

While the movie didn't set the U.S. box office aflame in its opening frame, it is set for theatrical release April 28 in Canada, with the United Kingdom to follow – and Woodley says he's happy just getting the movie seen.

"It's really just about hoping that people enjoy the movie and have a good time at the theater." 



Spark: A Space Tail follows the template of a classic hero's journey.



the Nut Job 2

nutty by nature

**YOU DON'T
HAVE TO BE BIG,
TO BE A HERO!**

AUGUST 2017



For further information or business opportunities
Contact | marketing@redrover.co.kr / www.thenutjob.com

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A Big Payoff

Disaster movie meets teenage cartoonists in Dash Shaw's hand-drawn feature debut, *My Entire High School Sinking into the Sea*. By Tom McLean.

It started as a bit of a joke in comic-book form, when cartoonist Dash Shaw created in 2009 a short story titled *My Entire High School Sinking into the Sea*, which he's now adapted into an animated feature that hit theaters April 14 via GKIDS following a successful run on the festival circuit.

"When I was a teenager in the '90s, the majority of alternative comics were autobio comics," says Shaw, best known for such titles as *BodyWorld*, *New School*, *Doctors* and *Bottomless Belly Button*. "Then on the opposite end of that were the boy's adventure superhero comics. And so the joke of my comic short story was that it was like a fake autobio comic that had been thrown into a boy's adventure comics setting."

Inspired by the simplicity of using applications like Photoshop to create animated GIFs, Shaw expanded from comics into animation.

"Once I saw that, I was like, 'Oh, you can

make a whole movie, it would just take doing those drawings,'" he says.

He created the 2009 web series titled *The Unclothed Man in the 35th Century AD* for IFC, followed by a 2012 music video for Icelandic rockers Sigur Ros.

For his first feature, Shaw says there was something about the original comic story he thought could be adapted to animation, particularly the way it was colored like an abstract expressionist painting in the mode of Mark Rothko. "That felt like a funny way of visualizing teenage angst," he says. "That the existential angst of those paintings would be paired with teenage angst felt appropriate and goofy."

It also seemed to be the most doable idea he had for an animated feature.

"This school movie had kind of a very simple video game structure," he says. "I thought I should start with things that feasibly I could do myself, like it's not very hard to paint class-

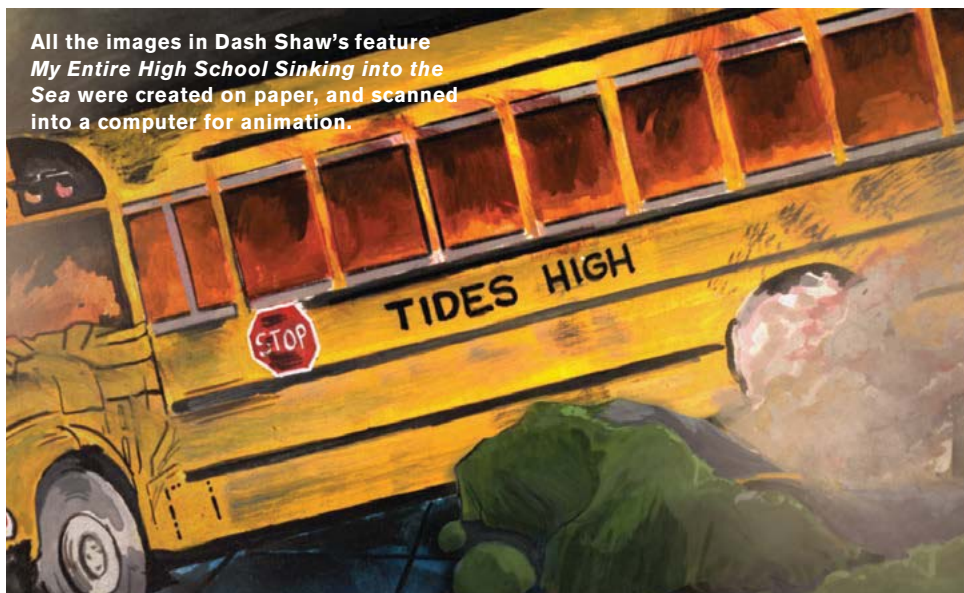
room backgrounds."

Shaw wrote and directed the feature, which tells the story of teenage Dash Shaw, whose regular life working on the school paper and hanging with best friend, Assaf, is thrown into turmoil when his seaside school tumbles into the ocean. Told with Shaw's art hand-drawn on paper and scanned into a computer for animation, the movie looks like nothing else out there as it follows young Dash and his friends' attempts to survive the disaster. It plays like a John Hughes movie crossed with *Titanic* or *The Towering Inferno*, and has earned rave reviews on the festival circuit.

Cartoon Doppelgänger

The movie version of Dash Shaw bears some resemblance to the director in his teen years. "I was a nerdy teenager and I worked on the school newspaper, so I had friends like the friends in this movie," he says. But he says the

All the images in Dash Shaw's feature *My Entire High School Sinking into the Sea* were created on paper, and scanned into a computer for animation.



character is only about half based on reality, the other half on fantasy. "I'm not a jerk like the guy in the movie," he says with a laugh. "And I feel like it's more maybe a parody of autobio stories or a parody of those kinds of Hollywood movie that are clearly the director's fantasy."

Asked if he thinks viewers will confuse the fictional Dash with the real one, Shaw says he hopes not. "I feel like it's really clearly a joke, but maybe I'm being optimistic," he says.

Shaw also took inspiration from the works of other comic-book artists who turned to animation, such as Osamu Tezuka on the original *Astro Boy*. "He wanted to compete with Disney but the Japanese television companies didn't give him enough money, so he created limited animation and he relied on his skills as a cartoonist to make cinema, and I always thought that that was super awesome," he says.

Shaw began work on the movie with his wife, animator Jane Samborski. "She really is the technical mind behind the movie," he says.

All of the movie was drawn on 8½-by-11-inch paper and animated using After Effects. "There's no lines that are made on the computer," says Shaw. "I storyboarded it in color markers and so there was a guide for the whole movie and indications of how the color would be and how everything would look."

Shaw used the boards to divide up the labor for each shot, with Samborski sometimes drawing the underlying images and friends of Shaw's from the comics world contributing things like painted backgrounds. Shaw inked all the drawings himself before they were scanned in the computer.

This way of working saved the project at one point when about 10 minutes of the movie was lost to a cut-and-paste error.

"But we still had all of the actual drawings, so it only took us a couple of days to put it back together," Shaw says.

Finding the Voices

Unusual for most animated projects, Shaw had about 80 percent of the animation done before he began looking for actors. Knowing nothing about that side of movie making, Shaw contacted producers Kyle Martin and Craig Zobel, whom he had met while they were all fellows at the Sundance Institute in 2010.

"I saw that they were two people that had made awesome movies relatively inexpensively and they both happened to live in my neighborhood when I lived in Brooklyn, and so I asked them to help me produce the movie," says Shaw.

The producers suggested for the lead role Jason Schwartzman, who Shaw had met years ago and stayed in touch with. Shaw also had met Lena Dunham at the Sundance labs and Martin had produced her feature film *Tiny Furniture*. With those names attached, and a chunk of the movie to show, the rest of the cast filled out with the likes of Maya Rudolph, Reggie Watts and Susan Sarandon as the unforgettable Lunch Lady Lorraine.

Once the voices were recorded, the animation was adjusted to accommodate the actors' performances. "The drawings were done, but they would be changed to match what the actor came up with," Shaw says.

The film was full of new experiences for Shaw, who says he's enjoyed the process of collaborating with actors, producers and an editor, and to see his movie play on the big screen.

"It was rad and I want to do it again," he says.

Serious Professional Development

Cyber Group Studios' CEO and chairman Pierre Sissmann outlines his three-pronged strategy for growing the creative and commercial scope of the Paris-based company.

By Tom McLean.

Many companies aspire to become global animation studios, producing work with a variety of techniques for diverse audiences on multiple platforms. But few have been as steadily successful in building such a business from scratch as Paris-based Cyber Group Studios, which 12 years from its founding has opened an office in Hollywood and implemented carefully weighed plans to grow in every way it can.

And with at least eight shows in production — among them *Zou*, *Mirette Investigates*, *The Pirates Next Door*, *Gigantosaurus*, *Sadie Sparks*, *Taffy*, *Tom Sawyer*, *Mini-Ninjas* and a handful of shows in development — Cyber Group's plan is so far, so good.

Speaking recently from Paris, co-founder,

chairman and CEO Pierre Sissmann outlined his three-pronged strategy for growing the company: International expansion, artistic development and increasing production capacity.

International Expansion

Sissmann says the company has spent the last five to seven years solidifying its international distribution capacities and developing properties that would appeal to all continents.

The next step comes with establishing subsidiaries that are on the ground in major markets. Cyber Group's first subsidiary opened at the start of 2017 in Los Angeles, headed up by Richard Goldsmith, formerly a high-ranking executive at The Jim Henson Co. and Warner Bros. Entertainment.

Sissmann sees an important advantage in

having a permanent presence in a market over constant travel or telecommunications from a single base.

"It was obvious for us that we had to be in the U.S.," he says. "When you look at what we intend to do the next couple of years, I would say we need to be establishing strong bases on other continents, to go from a French player to an international player to becoming a global player to becoming a regional player as well."

That kind of presence does several things, Sissmann says: It enables the company to better understand its clients, as well as global and regional markets. It also will help the company locate the creative talent needed to serve those markets.

He cites as an example a co-production Cy-





ber Group is doing with a Brazilian company. "It would be much easier if we were on the ground somewhere in Latin America than just going over Skype like people mostly do with co-productions," he says.

Goldsmith, for example, is charged with developing Cyber Group's business in China and Asia.

"I would like this company in five years from now to be on all continents with its own imprint so that we could work locally, regionally and globally with the best talents on all continents," Sissmann says.

Artistic Development

The second part of Sissmann's plans for Cyber Group is artistic development, which he defines as growing the company's ability to execute any kind of material it wants to as well as it can.

For example, he says, when Cyber Group started, it began by making CG preschool shows, which were unusual then. Having found success in that arena, the company set its sights on kids' shows, and in the process added 2D animation capabilities to its palette. Now, it's got hybrid and stop-motion projects

in the pipeline to develop the company's artistic abilities in those techniques.

"To create and execute in any kind of shape or form is an absolute objective," says Sissmann. "I don't want us to be stopped by looking at a great idea and saying we don't know how to do it."

'To create and execute in any kind of shape or form is an absolute objective. I don't want us to be stopped by looking at a great idea and saying we don't know how to do it.'



— Pierre Sissmann, CEO and Chairman, Cyber Group Studios.

"The only way to grow is to never be satisfied with what you do or, if you are satisfied, you want to do even better than that on the next step," says Sissmann.

While Cyber Group is large for an independent company, it has to carefully manage its budgets to ensure all its parts are working correctly.

"It's a question of pace — not going too fast and also anticipating market trends," Sissmann says. "Planning is critical because if you develop, let's say, 25 to 30 series and you produce only two, it makes no sense. And if you produce seven series and you can't sell them to anyone except to the commis-

sioning broadcasters, you're dead."

That's why careful management and benchmarking everything the company does is important to Sissmann, who says it minimizes the number of mistakes. "Something I say to my staff all the time is we are bound to make mistakes," he says. "And the one thing you should do when you make mistakes is to remember the mistakes. They should be on the board as big as your successes so you always remember where you came from." ☞

Growing Production Capacity

And that leads into the third prong of the strategy, which is to increase production capabilities so the studio can make the shows it wants to make when it wants to make them.

With eight or nine series in production right now, Cyber Group's production capabilities are very strong and held to a high standard. "We are control freaks," says Sissmann, a fact reflected by the studios' in-house production ethos.



A British Original

Blue-Zoo unites ambitious CG animation with broad appeal for kids in its stylish hit Nick Jr. preschool series *Digby Dragon*. By Karen Yossman.

In an era defined by remakes and adaptations, getting an original series commissioned is no easy feat, even one with a target demographic of ages 4 to 6. Which is why when British animation studio Blue-Zoo first pitched Nickelodeon's London office with *Digby Dragon*, a preschool show about an anthropomorphic Scottish fire-breather and his coterie of fantastical friends, they made sure to emphasize the series' blend of visual innovation coupled with old-school British charm to get the green light.

"It felt like a real heritage project," Blue-Zoo co-founder Oli Hyatt says of the show, which was conceived by author and illustrator Sally Hunter, best known for the children's book *Humphrey's Corner*. Hunter first approached Blue-Zoo in 2012 with a sketchbook full of ideas for *Digby*, although the timing was less

than ideal since the studio had recently decided to focus only on intellectual property developed in-house. But, Hyatt recalls, he soon "fell so in love with the character" he agreed to take on the show anyway.

Nickelodeon was equally smitten and quickly snapped up *Digby* for the network's preschool channel Nick Jr., on which it also airs in the United States. "We were immediately taken by *Digby Dragon*'s art style and, most importantly, the heart at the center of the series," says Alison Bakunowich, GM of Nickelodeon U.K. & Ireland. "*Digby Dragon* is a strong British property with lots of opportunity to develop across platforms and into consumer products."

Hyatt agrees that a large part of the show's appeal is down to its "unapologetic" Britishness. *Digby* is set in Applecross Wood, a real location in Scotland where Hunter used to

spend vacations with her grandparents, and, with an ensemble cast that includes characters such as Fizzy the Fairy and Grumpy Goblin, evokes classic children's stories such as *Winnie the Pooh*.

In fact, that tubby little cubby, who last year celebrated his 90th anniversary, was very much an inspiration for the show during the development process. "We wanted to have a brand that had longevity," Hyatt says, revealing that his goal for *Digby* was to produce "really high-quality animation and make something that felt like it wouldn't date that easily."

Quality Isn't Cheap

However, high-quality animation means higher production costs. To make the show financially viable, it had to have as broad an appeal as possible, which is why a decision was

Blue-Zoo achieves a hand-crafted look in CG that evokes the charm of stop-motion for *Digby Dragon*.



made to aim *Digby* at an older demographic than originally planned (4- to 6-year-olds as opposed to 3-year-olds). "If you start at 3, you can never go up," Hyatt says. "If you start at 5, you can go down."

Visually this involved redesigning the characters to look a little less cute and rotund than those initially conceived by Hunter, and changing the color palette from pastels to earthy hues. Storywise, the writing was also reworked to make it more "aspirational" for pre-schoolers, says series producer and director Adam Shaw: "It was really working on the character dynamics to increase the amount of drama and peril but also to increase the comedy and the character interaction."

But it was the show's unique visual style that proved a main selling point, with attendees at last year's Brand Licensing Europe even enquiring if *Digby* was a feature rather than a television series.

"It hasn't got the shiny, flat CG feel of so many shows," says Hyatt. Part of that is down to the stop-frame feel of the animation, which was achieved by eliminating soft movement in

between key poses.

"That was a style decision I made right at the very beginning," says Shaw. "We wanted the show to have more of a hand-crafted and textural feel."

While initially that might have seemed like a time-saver, in reality it threw up a series of technical challenges the team had to overcome.

"Things like camera moves suddenly be-



came an issue," says animation director Matt Tea. "Because characters are moving every other frame so, if you had a fluid camera, the characters would almost kind of jitter across screen space."

Crafting Every Frame

Instead of relying on key frames and breakdowns, the animators ended up having to construct almost every individual key frame.

"Every single frame was pretty much crafted to be a specific frame that we needed," Tea says. "So in that sense, what we thought would be an easier approach because there would be fewer frames to animate actually proved to be more work."

But for Shaw, the hybrid-style animation, which he felt complemented the "hand-painted and hand-crafted environments and characters," was integral to visually communicating the show's themes of nature and the beauty of the natural world, as well as providing an opportunity to demonstrate his team's skill.

"There's a slightly different approach in being able to fully tell their story in their key poses and not relying

upon any shortcuts you can make through blending and in-betweens," Shaw says. "It really puts the emphasis on posing and timing, which is what animation should be all about." ▬



An Epic Flashback

Archer gets the film noir treatment as season eight diverts TV's most vain spy and his eccentric coterie to 1947 Los Angeles. By Tom McLean.

Keeping things fresh has never been a problem for *Archer*.

Launched in 2009 on FX as a comedy about a secret agent who works for his mother, the series' success has allowed creator Adam Reed and exec producer Matt Thompson to make some daring diversions, most notably season five's *Archer Vice* arc.

But when the show's eight-episode eighth season debuted April 5 on FXX, the series took a radical turn. Retitled *Archer Dreamland*, the show has been reinvented in the vein of a film noir set in 1947 Los Angeles.

We caught up with Thompson to talk about the new season.

Animag: Tell me about where the idea for this season came from?

Matt Thompson: It started off with how we wanted to end season seven, and it was one of my favorite endings we've ever had to a season. We're trying to fake you out and make you think: 'Oh, Archer's not going to be dead. Just this robot is going to be dead.' But then both of them appear to be dead. We just didn't want to come back and say everything's OK. One of things that makes this cartoon different is that the universe has consequences, so for everybody to come back from season seven and all is well just didn't feel right. So this entire season takes place inside of Archer's head

as he's in a coma.

Animag: What were the advantages to this approach?

Thompson: It allowed for a great consequence to happen at the end of season seven and it allows for a singular storyline, which actually takes place just over eight to 10 days. This entire season of *Archer* is almost like a Kiefer Sutherland 24 reboot. Archer is just trying to investigate in 1947 the death of his partner, Woodhouse, and it's really an extreme departure for us. We're excited for people to see it not just because it's going to look like nothing we've ever done before.

Animag: How will the characters' relationships change?

Thompson: At the core of the show is Archer's relationship with his mother, Mallory, and typically she's been at the head of this spy agency and Archer works for her. In this, in 1947, it's different but the same. Now Mallory is no longer Mallory. Her name is Mother and she is the head of basically a mob syndicate, a criminal organization, and she takes on Archer to help her do something. ... So he's still working for his mother, but that relationship has changed. She's kind of harder than she had been in the past and she's got to protect her criminal empire now and Archer is no longer beholden to just do things because she is his mother, he is only doing things under threat.

Animag: Is this Archer native to 1947, or is he walking around wondering where everyone's cell phones are?

Thompson: We decided that once we get into 1947, we're in 1947. It's been the





The crew of *Archer Dreamland* took great pains to research film noir and accurate costumes for the show, which is set in 1947 Los Angeles.

biggest writing challenge for Adam, the simple fact that the people don't have easy access to telephones.

Animag: *Well you mentioned that you think this is one of the best-looking seasons, can you talk a little bit about getting the look of 1947 L.A. right?*

Thompson: We really went back and did a lot of research, specifically film noir stuff, things like *The Maltese Falcon*. We actually hired a costume designer for this season, which we hadn't done in seasons past. We've had people on staff serve as our costume designers on seasons past, but this season we want it to be so accurate with the clothing that people were wearing that we hired a costume designer who had worked on the short lived series *Mob City*.

But I think that the largest thing adding to the different look for the season is the lighting, the special attention that our staff had to take in the compositing of all these scenes. If you look at any of those scenes from *The Maltese Falcon* and all of that film noir stuff, it's the way that the light comes through the blinds, it's the way light shines through. And because a lot of these things are black and white, they're using heavy contrast, and we really tried to pay a great deal of attention to how things were being lit.

Animag: *How did making those changes affect your pipeline? Was this a tougher sea-*



son to animate?

Thompson: It's slowed it down greatly. We call our background characters that really have nothing to do with the scene "drones," and all of our drones have been built up over six or seven seasons of the show so we could pop people in the background. But now all those drones had to have new clothes, and that meant that our illustration department really had to draw much, much, much more heavily than in seasons past.

Animag: *You have a complete season here and a couple of more seasons ordered up after this one. Do you have a plan for what you're going to do to top this?*

Thompson: We do. We definitely have a plan, but I'm not wanting to talk about it yet. But I will say that the ending to the season is very dramatic. And the final episode of this season is astounding. Big, big things happen at the end of it. It feels almost overwhelming. ☞

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Perfect Match

The show runners behind DreamWorks' new *Spirit Riding Free* series for Netflix bring a widescreen, Western look to new toon adventures for a girl and her horse. By Tom McLean.

There's no denying that meaningful bonds can be formed in an instant — love at first sight, a horse perfectly matched with its rider, or an artist bringing to life a story they've long dreamed of creating.

The latter two are particularly apropos in the case of *Spirit Riding Free*, DreamWorks Animation Television's new series based on the studio's 2002 feature *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron*, and its show runners, Aury Wallington and Jim Schumann.

"My whole life, I've been obsessed with horse stories," says Wallington, who launched her TV writing career as a script coordinator on HBO's *Sex and the City*. "I certainly loved the shows that I grew up with, which were more of the *Mork & Mindy*, *Facts of Life* sort of things, but I always dreamed about having a show that encompassed those stories from the books that I loved so much about adventure and freedom."

That opportunity finally came to pass for Wallington, who's also written for shows such as *Heroes* and *Gravity Falls*, when a series based on *Spirit* was on the table during a meeting with DreamWorks Animation Television.

"It instantly caught me because the thought of having a chance to tell that story, to make the show that 9-year-old me would have gone

bananas over, was really irresistible," says Wallington.

The writing appealed to veteran animation writer, director and producer Jim Schumann. He was working with DreamWorks Animation TV on a project that didn't come together when he read Wallington's pilot script. "It's the reason I took the gig," he says. "I could see it. I knew what it was going to look like. The characters were genuine. The story was genuine. It was exciting."

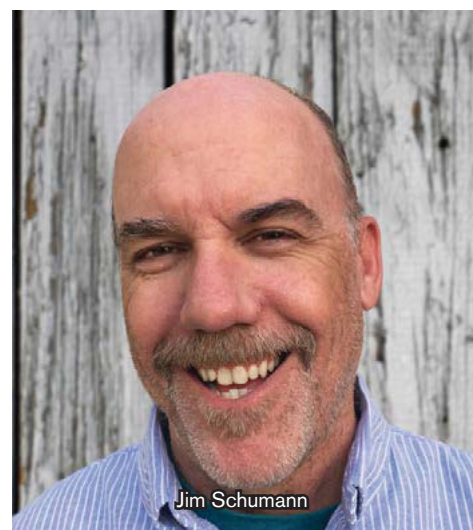
Arriving with six episodes May 5 on Netf-

lix, *Spirit Riding Free* tells the tale of a gutsy 12-year-old girl named Lucky, who meets a resilient mustang named Spirit — the offspring of the feature film version — when her family settles out west in the 1890s. With her two new best friends — and their horses — by her side, Lucky explores a new world of freedom and adventure.

The show features the voices of Amber Montana (*The Haunted Hathaways*), Sydney Park (*Instant Mom*) and Bailey Gambertoglio (*Bubble Guppies*).



Aury Wallington



Jim Schumann

Set in 1890, *Spirit Riding Free* explores the West through the eyes of 12-year-old Lucky, her horse and her friends.



Following Its Own Path

Wallington's vision for the show was unusual for animation in several ways. The horses, for example, are not anthropomorphized either in their actions or via narration, as the film did. There also are no magical or fantasy elements, and the stories and characters are grounded in a very realistic and genuine way.

This gave Schumann and the show's crew the chance to experiment with unusual looks and techniques.

"Me and (art director) Ellen Jin were influenced by stuff that was coming out of Europe, like the Netherlands," he says. "We wanted the show to be big. We wanted to shoot it like a Western – big and wide – and use the frame."

That ambition was not lost on the crew, which rose to the unusual challenges *Spirit Riding Free* presented.

"When we started, we knew it was going to be a tough show, but everybody on this show has bought in to what we're trying to accomplish," says Schumann. "There's a level of commitment to this show that I haven't experienced a lot in other shows. On a lot of other shows, it's just a gig, but here everybody is just so committed because we kind of know we're doing something special."

For the lighting, Schumann turned the stan-



dard approach for TV a little to the right. "Most CG shows have what's called 12 noon lighting, where everything is above the head, and then there's supplementary lighting," he says. "We put our lighting at 2 o'clock, sort of like late afternoon, so we get some really nice shadows."

The look also led to a shading style and a cinematic look. "It's not like a classic toon shading, but more of a hybrid," says Schumann. "We also used a lot of 2D elements in the artwork and on the sets and stuff, so it gives us a really striking look to the show."

Grounded and Accessible

The look also is designed to play to the strengths of the writing. "It's set in 1890, but we didn't want the period details to in any way weigh the show down or stand as a barrier that would make it less accessible to the audi-


ence," says Wallington. "So we're trying to do a contemporary show in a historical setting and the look of the show helps give us this flavor of the period, the Old West, with the long shadows, the faded-out color in certain places and the vibrant colors in other places."

As for the animation, which is being done by Technicolor in India, horses are a real challenge to get right. Schumann says they pulled a lot of reference from the

Spirit feature as well as other reference on how horses walk, gallop and run. The goal was to ensure the horses' personalities came through without doing anything that looks unreal or takes the audience out of the realistic elements.

Wallington says it's been fun to write for animation, which required a bit of a learning curve to understand what could and couldn't be done easily in CG.

"It didn't feel different from writing live-action. This is the story I wanted to tell," she says. "I've been lucky in having Jim and the rest of the team, who are so on the ball."

Both are extremely proud of the results and anxious to see how the show is received. "We probably wouldn't have been able to make this show at any other studio," says Schumann. "It's been a really great experience." 

Toon Competition

A trio of hardy animated shorts score coveted competition slots in the Cannes Film Festival, the world's most prestigious platform for motion pictures. By Tom McLean.

The Cannes Film Festival is the most prestigious in the world and exemplifies in many ways the hierarchy of the overall global movie business. Here, live action rules – directors, actors, cinematographers and their latest artistic works are greeted like royalty. And while animation is not excluded from the festival in any way, the emphasis and majority of interest in the event clearly lies elsewhere, while animation producers and fans prepare to congregate a month later in nearby Annecy for a festival dedicated to toons.

But animation's presence has been growing in recent years. The competition for the 70th Cannes Film Festival, set to run May 17-28, includes no animated features, but there are a trio of animated shorts – all made by women – that will be in the running in other areas: *Pépé le Morse* (*Grandpa Walrus*), directed by Lucrèce Andreae, is in the short film competition, while two student animated films – Léa Krawczyk's *À Perdre Haleine* (*Breathless*) and Imge Özbilge's *Camouflage* – grace the Cinéfondation section. Cristian Mungiu is presiding over the jury for both short films and the Cinéfondation.

This year also sees the return of Animation Day in Cannes, an event independent of the festival that spotlights animated projects and presents panels and networking opportunities.

Cannes Short Film Competition *Pépé le Morse* (*Grandpa Walrus*)

Directed by Lucrèce Andreae, France, 14'

Produced by Paris-based Caïmans Productions and directed by 28-year-old Lucrèce Andreae, a native of Bordeaux, *Pépé le Morse* tells a tale set on a cloudy beach where a family mourns their recently-deceased, eccentric grandfather.

Andreae explained to *Animation Magazine* shortly after the selection was announced the origins of the short and how it was made.

"I wanted to talk about the death, the loss of a relative, and also about the complex links that exist in a family," says Andreae. "I did it in animation because drawing and the cinema are my favorite tools. I love to play with time, sound, music, light, rhythm, acting and, of

course, with painting and drawing. That's why cinema is so rich and complete for me."

Funded via typical French channels – regional funds, CNC funds, the Arte TV channel fund – the film took about a two and a half years to produce and required about 40 people to make.

Production was mostly digital. Artists drew on Cintiq screens and animated with TVPaint, while backgrounds were painted on paper.

Landing a spot at the prestigious festival was unexpected and will be the first public showing of the movie, which will next screen at Annecy, Andreae says.

"I didn't think the film had a chance to be selected because animation is not represented much in Cannes usually," she says "But we decided to apply because the dates were perfect, and because it's, of course, a very important and symbolic historical festival."

Cinéfondation *À Perdre Haleine* (*Breathless*)

Directed by Léa Krawczyk, La Poudrière, France, 4'

Léa Krawczyk always had a passion for toons, but it took a while for her to decide to become an animator. Too young out of high school to apply to Gobelins, the Paris native studied architecture. But in her fourth year, she audited an animation class and the power of the medium compelled her to take it up.

After some prep, Krawczyk, now 27, studied at la Poudrière in Valence, completing *À Perdre Haleine* as her graduation film. The short is about a young cellist who, on the night of her concert, is overcome by her fears and anguish. The concept came from Krawczyk's own experience with anxiety crises, which be-

Continued on page 22

Pépé le Morse (*Grandpa Walrus*)





Sadie Sparks

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Continued from page 20

gan for her just before starting at la Poudrière.

"They were short, but still, disturbing," she says. "It was such a deeply disturbing and strong experience that I wanted to tell a story about these peculiar emotions. And also, I must say, understand what was happening to me."

Preproduction took about five months, production about three months and post about three weeks, she says. Completed at the end of June, la Poudrière submitted it – as it does all its student films – to Cannes. The film also has been selected to screen at Cinanima 2016 in Espinho, Animateka 2016 in Ljubljana, le Carrefour de l'Animation 2016 in Paris, Monstra 2017 in Lisbon, and the Animafest Zagreb 2017.

Krawczyk has finished a short adaptation of Paul Éluard's poem *L'amoureuse* (*The Lover*) and is developing personal projects, a new animation short and a book for preschool children.

Camouflage

Directed by Imge Özbilge, KASK, Belgium, 6'

Imge Özbilge was inspired by something she experienced in the increasingly polarized society of Turkey to write *Camouflage*, which is about a forbidden friendship that blossoms in a city where East meets West.

"Populism is becoming dangerous all over the world and that's why I believe that we need to stay together even more and talk about these issues," she says.

Though her travel-loving and artistic parents are from Istanbul, the 29-year-old Özbilge was born in Vienna and spent much of her life in one city or the other. Her childhood love of art lead her to experiment with animation as one of many forms of expression, and she studied animation at KASK in Belgium.

"The reason why I told the story in animation is the freedom you have with animation in creating surreal imagery, which can create multiple meanings," she says. The film takes the audience to a mysterious and surreal world inspired by Ottoman miniatures and Hieronymus Bosch. "I like to work with sublayers. They leave open space for interpretation and therefore create a connection with the audience."

Production took about a year, with plenty of advice from her KASK mentor Luc Degryse and her sister and fellow artist, Sine Özbilge.

The images begin as ink on paper, then were scanned into the computer using Photoshop and animated with After Effects.

Surprised by her acceptance into the Cinéfondation, Özbilge next plans to gain some experience in the animation industry and eventually wants to co-direct an animated feature with her sister.



Window of Opportunity

Animation Day in Cannes returns to give projects a highly visible platform at the esteemed festival.

Finding a platform to promote animated projects in Cannes has not always been easy, which is exactly why Bruno Chatelin of FilmFestivals.com and his partners decided three years ago to stage Animation Day in Cannes.

"There was potential that's absolutely huge for promotion, but no one has ever cared about or organized anything about animation," says Chatelin, who has 30 years experience attending the festival and market on the advertising, marketing and promotion sides of the business for companies including Sony and 20th Century Fox. "It's not only the No. 1 film event with a great competition, it's also a place where 5,000 media are attending, and they all are looking for nice things to write about and report. If you have a good story, a good product, a good idea, then it can hit really worldwide."

Organized by Chatelin; Laurie Gordon, a filmmaker, animation producer and director of the Animaze – Montreal International Animation Film Festival; and Martin I. Petrov, also director of the Montreal International Animation Film Festival and the Glasgow World of Film, this year's event will be held May 23 at the Grand Hotel Cannes.

The event includes a screening at the Palais des Festivals of submitted projects – excerpts, previews, works in progress, etc. – which is presented to buyers and select media. This year's screening is set for Palais B at 1:30 p.m. on May 23.

Networking opportunities are set for the Turkish Pavilion in the International Village, allowing reps for animation projects to meet, conduct demos and make deals.

Awards spotlighting important projects also will be presented as part of Animation Day in Cannes. Among this year's honors, will be an accolade for the filmmakers behind the Oscar-nominated feature *My Life as a Zucchini*, from the European Film Academy. The Animation That Matters Award, presented last year to the feature *Bilal*, also will be awarded.

Lastly, the event will include two panels: One about the specifics of marketing animation projects, and a focus on the making of *My Life as a Zucchini*.

For more information on how to participate in Animation Day at Cannes, visit its website at animationdayincannes.com.



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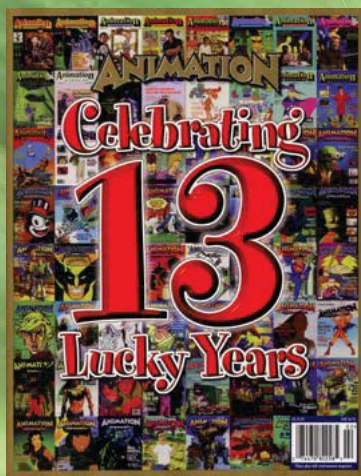
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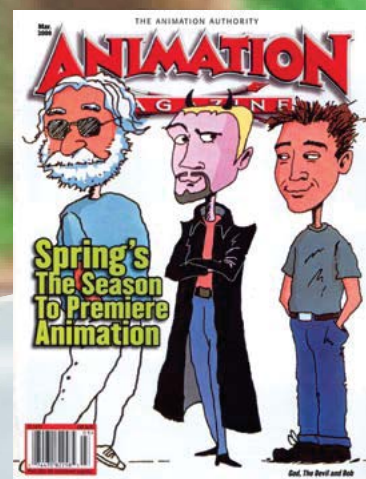
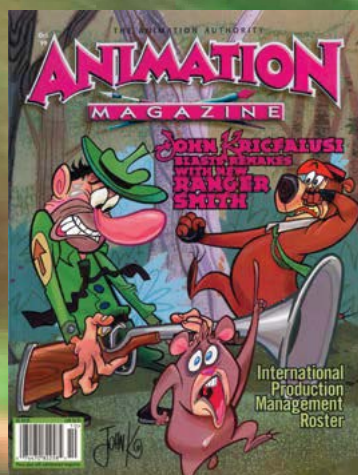


CELEBRATING
30
years



At the End of

Animation radically transformed on the big screen
few worthy-but-failed experiments



It was 1999, and the animation industry was enjoying itself like it was, well, 1999.

It was also *Animation Magazine's* 13th anniversary, and – never having been the sort to do things in conventional fashion – we celebrated this oddball occasion with a “lucky” special edition.

The year in animation was full of innovation, with TV debuts for such well-regarded series as *Futurama*, *The PJs*, *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *Courage the Cowardly Dog*, *Dilbert*, *Home Movies* and a little thing called *Family Guy*. Many of these debuts graced a cover story on the growth of animation on TV, a medium that also was seeing an explosion in the use of visual effects. Other TV projects that graced the cover that year include Warner Bros' *Batman Beyond* and the short-lived but still-remembered *Mission Hill*.

The October 1999 issue featured one of the magazine's coolest covers ever: a *Ranger Smith* image from John Kricfalusi that ran alongside a piece

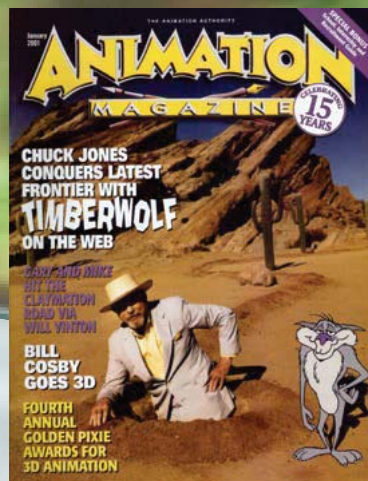
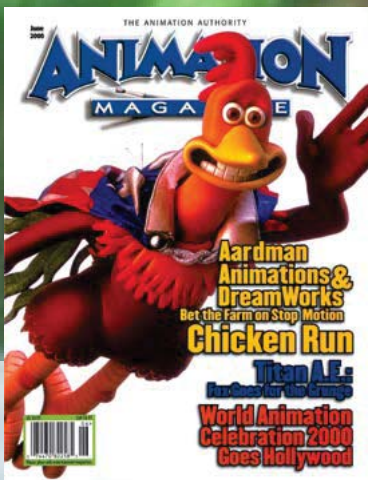
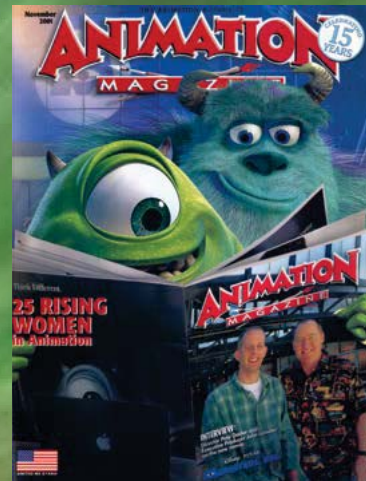
in which the outspoken animator explains how he set out to remake cartoon remakes with his reimagining of Yogi Bear.

Then, an atomic bomb of animation and VFX disruption arrived in May with the release of the still-controversial *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace*. Fan reaction remains, at best, divided and, more commonly, derisive of George Lucas' return to a galaxy far, far away. But the film inarguably carried on the franchise's history of pushing the envelope for visual effects, delivering the most-complex and just plain most digital effects ever seen in a movie. Nearly quadrupling the number of effects shots seen in even the biggest tentpoles, *Episode I* set the stage for the digital VFX explosion of the 21st century.

For animated features, it was a strong year for indie titles as *The Iron Giant* snuck out and won everywhere the hearts of fans (but not box office dollars), while *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut* successfully brought the insanity and hilarity of the TV series to the big screen with a surprisingly

of a Century

and small, with huge successes and more than a
marking the millennial transition.



scatological yet satisfying musical. The year wrapped with a double dose of studios working at their peak, with Sony's *Stuart Little* and Pixar's *Toy Story 2* both serving up striking cover images.

The final year of the 20th century, 2000 was a rougher year for animation. High-profile projects that made the cover of *Animation Magazine* only to overpromise and underdeliver: *God, the Devil and Bob*, Disney's *Dinosaur*, DreamWorks' *Road to El Dorado* and *The Adventures of Rocky & Bullwinkle*. Traditional 2D animation took a big hit with the failure of Fox's much-hyped sci-fi epic *Titan A.E.* But all was redeemed by Aardman's faith in stop-motion – and a good story – with the success of *Chicken Run*.

The magazine celebrated a more conventional milestone in 2001: its 15th anniversary. In a bit of a throwback move, animators reappeared on the covers, starting with the always-awesome Chuck Jones, who stood in a hole at Vasquez Rocks north of Los Angeles to plug his *Timberwolf* web project.

Traditional animation was still going strong, with our 100th issue featuring

Craig McCracken and his durable creation, *The Powerpuff Girls*, followed by a cover feature on Will Vinton Studios and its 25th anniversary.

Summer brought *Shrek* into our lives, along with a huge financial boost and much-needed creative momentum for DreamWorks. The industry prepped for the first Animated Feature Oscar race, wondering if it was going to stick around (it has – and how!). The first trophy went to *Shrek*.

Fall brought with it the tragedy of the 9/11 terrorist attacks – a United We Stand logo appeared on our covers in support.

The year wrapped with Pixar releasing *Monsters, Inc.*, an occasion marked with a clever cover featuring Mike Wazowski and Sulley reading a copy of the magazine that had on its cover a photo of director Pete Docter and executive producer John Lasseter.

Check out more of the archives at www.animationmagazine.net, and feel free to share your favorite memories of *Animation Magazine* by emailing us at edit@animationmagazine.net.

Keep Your Clients Forever

The most expensive part of just about any business is getting a client in the door. Countless advertising dollars, marketing plans and massive amounts of time and effort are often required to land a single client. So, once acquired, it is of paramount importance to keep them forever.

Keep Doing What You're Doing

Your client initially chose to work with you for two reasons and two reasons only: One, you have something they want or need, and, two, they trusted you enough to give you their business. If either of these things were not present, they would never have entered a transaction with you. Additionally, if either of these things get dinged in the future, you will more than likely lose the client. To keep your clients, you must always deliver, and always deliver the quality they are expecting (and, for your peace of mind, not much more). Contrary to the concept of underpromising and overdelivering that so many people claim to embrace, this can be a very dangerous, slippery slope. If you continuously overdeliver, your clients will grow to expect this from you *gratis*, or without being grateful for your over achievements on their behalf. The luster of going above and beyond without them asking can wear off quickly and turn into base expectations. Foot, meet gun.

Show Appreciation and Reward for Continued Business

Recurrent business from existing clients is often the most profitable thing a business can achieve. Therefore, when they come back, make sure you show appreciation. Send a hand-written card, write a short but sincere email, send holiday gifts, make a quick phone call, do any of a number of small gestures to let the client know you are thinking of them and are grateful for your relationship.

In a Pavlovian sense, you can get a lot of mileage out of always responding with something positive, kind and grateful whenever your

client requests more work from you, and, moreover, when payment arrives.

Additionally, reward your clients for continued business in service and value. Give them a modest discount on certain services. Offer them exclusive benefits that only they are qualified to receive. Make a total of all the special benefits, discounts and perks they receive and send a formal report at the end of the year with these totals. You must communicate and

you must take this same approach with your clients.

Another key to building a business relationship is to always make your clients feel confident and special when you are working together, as if they are the only client you have. If you happen to run late with a project, never say it's due to being busy with other projects. After all, it's your duty to only accept projects that you can commit to finishing on time and



quantify these benefits to the client, otherwise they will go unnoticed and unappreciated.

Develop Relationships, Not Projects

The key to client longevity and loyalty is building relationships, not projects. Some of the biggest business deals have been made on handshakes, not business plans or sales material. Focus on continuing to deliver value to your clients, not the mechanics of what you do, but how it will benefit them. Always offer to help, never sell. Sales is for strangers, helping is for people with whom you have a relationship. For example, picture your best friend. Now, picture your best friend reading from a focus group-tested script, giving you a formal sales pitch on which movie to see. Doesn't feel right, does it? It makes much more sense for your best friend to say, "Hey, I saw this last week – it's awesome! I'm dying to see it again, I think you'll love it, let's check it out." If you hope to build positive business relationships,

on budget in the first place. Failing to do this because you are working on something else is unacceptable and will often result in losing client trust and more than likely the client, as well.

Think of a client as a tree. In the infancy stage, it is fragile and requires a lot of nurturing. Over time, with continued care, each one will grow tall and strong, provide shade for you and even weather massive storms. Treat each one as if it is unique and special, spend time building relationships, consistently and persistently add value and provide benefits, and your clients will remain by your side forever. ☞

Martin Grebing is president of Funnybone Animation and can be reached via www.funnyboneanimation.com.



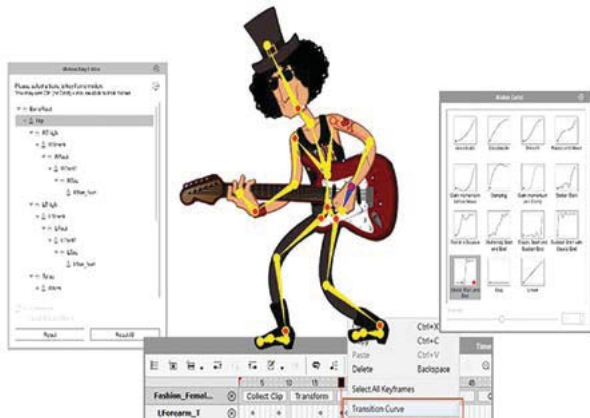


The World Animation and VFX Summit, a three-day event in Marina del Rey, Calif., is the premier prestige networking event for professionals working in animation and VFX. Hosted by Animation Magazine, the summit is held at the California Yacht Club just before the American Film Market.



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www.animationmagazine.net/summit



CrazyTalk Animator 3

www.reallusion.com/crazytalk-animator

So, let's talk about this CrazyTalk Animator 3.

In last issue's discussion about Perception Neuron, I mentioned that 3D motion-capture data could be fed into CTA3 and be applied to 2D characters through the bone deformation system. But that is certainly not the end of CTA3 functions.

The bone-based skeletal system has quite a few applications in a number of different areas within CTA3. The deforming capabilities allow you to attach bones to any imported image to add subtle – or not-so-subtle – animation. Get a scan of the Mona Lisa, extract her from the background, bring her into CTA3 and attach a series of bones, and then add a little head bob to some music.

This bone-driven approach allows you to break up characters for more complex animations, by breaking apart limbs and head from body, and mask out the influences, so the arms don't affect the chest, for instance.

Then, these bone systems can be saved as templates and you can swap out the characters, but use the same bone systems and same animations between them. So maybe you have five zombies. You can animate one and use the bone setup and animation as at least a foundation for the others. (You wouldn't want to use *exactly* the same animation because zombies are individuals, of course.)

Included in CTA3 is a library of human and animal motions, which can be layered into the timeline as sequences of animation that blend into one another. You can then take sprites that you've built that are components of your character, and attach them to the correlating

pieces on the template, including access to accessories like hats, jewelry, etc.

Facial animation has been enhanced with some key audio features, like scrubbing and text-to-speech tools for syncing the audio to phonemes. But with an added free-form deformation tool, you can add more movement into your original sprites to put in some additional personality. The facial animation system has been expanded beyond human faces to include animals, too.

There are definitely more things to find in the CrazyTalk Animator package, including drag-and-drop animation behaviors and curves, customized FFDs for props, and expression-based animations. As well as the integration of 3D motion, including motion-capture data, as mentioned in conjunction with the Perception Neuron

But try it out for yourself, or ask clients like Jimmy Kimmel, HBO, and Keanu Reeves, for starters.

V-Ray 3.5.5

www.chaosgroup.com/vray/3ds-max

These guys at Chaos Group. They just seem to never rest. And all of this lack of sleep has really come to fruition. I mean, not only is V-Ray well loved around the world, but creator Vlado Koylazov received a Sci-Tech plaque from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, meaning Oscars folks loved it, too.

But not to rest on the golden laurels of awards, yet another version of V-Ray 3.5 has been pushed out for Max, with a Maya version hot on its tail.

The principal addition to 3.5 and a huge render-time saver is adaptive lights, which feels like the evolutionary next step from probabilistic lights, which was in the last release. Instead of choosing a specific number of lights that will “probably” affect the solution, V-Ray uses the light cache (known from the global illumination algorithms) to inform which lights to eliminate from the calculation without affecting the end result. This may not help as much if you have, say, eight lights, but when you are getting into the hundreds of lights, the time savings are dramatic.

You now have interactive production rendering. “But isn't that what V-Ray RT is for?” you may ask. Sort of. IPR actually works in conjunction with the the advanced renderer, while RT is a separate renderer altogether. RT must export the scene before it can start rendering while IPR accesses the scene directly, which means it can start rendering almost immediately.

Also, V-Ray 3.5 has established “resumable rendering,” which, like it sounds, allows you to pickup a render where it left off. Maybe your ferret chewed through your power cable while you were rendering. Once you've bought a new cable, you would be able to restart the render from the point when Minky bit through. And it works in both bucket and progressive render modes.

Some third-party shaders have received a



nod. The alSurface that Arnold lovers cherish has been adapted for V-Ray, primarily as a complex skin shader. And MDL shaders from the NVidia library have been incorporated, as well as Forest Color support.

Furthermore, a ton of stuff has been pushed to the GPU for faster processing, including in-buffer lens effects, aerial perspective, V-Ray clipper, directional area lights, stochastic flakes, rounded corners, matte shadow, render mask, irradiance maps, and on-demand MIP-mapping. And they threw in a low GPU thread priority for load balancing.

Everyone loves beautiful renders. But everyone loves them more when they're faster!

Phoenix FD 3.0 for Maya

www.chaosgroup.com/phoenix-fd/maya

And while we are on the topic of Chaos Group – you know, and that technical Oscar – they also have a fluid-solver called Phoenix FD, and version 3.0 was recently released for Maya.

Originally something one would turn to for smoke and fire, 3.0 now has an actual fluid – as in water – flip solver, which is all the rage in Houdini and RealFlow. Phoenix has all that, including the extra generated maps for creating foam on the surface of the water and wet maps for the geography it's interacting with.

But don't forget about the original tried and true fire and smoke. The solver has been updated to handle finer detail resolutions. But even if you have all that, you still have to render those volumes – and so the volume rendering has gotten a speed boost.

"Setups for all that smoke and such can be time consuming," you may say. And for the most part you are right. But quick preset buttons have made it so you can get all that foundation work out of the way, and you can get to tweaking and making it super cool.



Additionally, the team at Chaos Group has added some fancy forces to interact with both the fluid fluids, and the water fluids. Path follow does what it says it does. The fluids will follow a chosen spline or splines. Then there is body force, which allows you to use a mesh to determine the shape of the force.

Basically, Phoenix is a light form of RealFlow or Houdini without the overhead – but also without many of the bells and whistles. Chaos Group is firmly hitting the soft belly of the same market as FumeFX.

Flowbox flowbox.io

So, I'm just gonna say it. Roto blows. Honestly. I'm just not a fan.

But then there are those times where a tool comes along that makes you just a bit giddy because, like Tom Sawyer convincing his friends that painting the fence is fun, something draws you closer to believing rotoscoping is something that you don't need to do as punishment.

I listed Flowbox as a top tech to check out for last year, but I'm only just getting to it now, mainly because this cracking group of upstarts had some features that they really wanted to get down before people started clamoring

about it from the mountain tops.

Flowbox looks and feels like Nuke, but using pen strokes, rather than click-dragging, you get a freeform style of connecting and disconnecting nodes. But, the workflow feels comfortable, like your slippers. Among the familiar roto tools, though, are some powerful ones that could be potential game changers.

The first is the stroke mode, which essentially puts you into a freehand mode to trace an outline using your Wacom or whatnot. Or you can be laying points the old fashioned way and switch over to stroke mode, and then back again. The completed stroke becomes a point-based, controllable curve, whose density can be adjusted. So now what do you do, you can't just go freestylin' and draw curves all over the place and expect clean, non-fluttery roto shapes. Or can you?

The snap line feature understands the structure of the previously drawn stroke and kind of projects onto the new stroke you've drawn on the new frame. The points move with an intelligence to try and ensure the fidelity of the silhouette.

Now if that isn't enough to draw you back into being a lover of rotoscoping, Flowbox has an intelligent ripple edit, which means that changes made to a point on a curve will propagate over all the key frames on that shape in the sequence. But what other flavors of this tool don't have is an understanding of where those shapes go when the overall roto shape rotates. Not so for this tool – the adjust points follow the ripple in a more useful way.

But the Flowbox guys aren't stopping there. As more tools become available, it won't be surprising to see this evolve into a compositing tool. In fact, Flowbox FX is already getting some buzz.

But back in the rotoscoping world, one of the forthcoming features is a workflow for real-time collaboration in the same file, with multiple artists working on different shapes for the same roto. I have a few shots heading my way right now that could use that kind of collaboration.



www.zivadynamics.com

This technology used to be developed internally at large visual-effects facilities with R&D money or hacked together in a pseudo-functional way that got us believing that the char-

But, the review was slated for *now*, so I guess you all will just have to wait.

www.allegorithmic.com

In Substance Designer 6.0, Algorhythmic appears to have found room to make a powerful piece of software just that much more powerful. Among all kinds of preferences to make user experience better, and some tweaks under the hood to make things faster, there have been a number of new nodes to play with in your Substance script.

As I said earlier, a super strong release to an already super strong product.

Todd Sheridan Perry is a visual-effects supervisor and digital artist who has worked on features including *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, *Speed Racer*, 2012, *Final Destination 5* and *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. You can reach him at todd@teaspoonvfx.com.



ANIMATION DAY IN CANNES

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Animation Day in Cannes in partnership with www.filmfestivals.com and Animaze: The Montreal International Animation Film Festival invites all animation film professionals attending the Cannes Film Festival to join our events and benefit from exclusive opportunities to see first previews of new animation projects, promote their activity and network with fellow experts in the field.

The Animation Day in Cannes Discoveries screenings
 May 23 1:30pm Palais B Theatre reserved for buyers and press.

PANELS:

Marketing Animation: the specifics
 My Life as a Zucchini - details of a success story! Turkish Pavillon 10 - 12 am



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Hard Wired

An iconic anime gets a live-action update as Scarlett Johansson steps into the Major's shoes in *Ghost in the Shell*. By Trevor Hogg.

The live-action upgrade of *Ghost in the Shell* by filmmaker Rupert Sanders (*Snow White and the Huntsman*) stars Scarlett Johansson (*Under the Skin*) as a government-sanctioned cyborg hunting an Internet terrorist who is hacking into the minds of the cyber-enhanced citizens of New Port City.

Realizing that not everything could be captured practically, Sanders sought the Oscar-winning expertise of Guillaume Rocheron (*Life of Pi*) and John Dykstra (*Star Wars*) to

supervise 1,200 visual-effects shots, of which 996 were done by MPC.

"We had to build a city with all of these 'solograms' (solid holographic advertisements)," says MPC Visual-Effects Supervisor Axel Bonami. "Other facilities worked on the graphic design as we were constructing the city at the same time."

Sixty ads were created with some of them the size of a skyscraper.

"We had a rig with 80 video cameras synced

together shooting clips that were around 400 frames long," says Bonami. "Then we had to solve each image in photogrammetry to generate a three-dimensional model, which had the texture baked in. A pixelized-look was applied to every frame of the model that varied depending on the quality of the advertisements. Once we knew where the solograms were going to be put into the city, we did a secondary lighting pass to incorporate the actual shot lighting."

Establishing shots that float above and



Making Major's thermoptic suit work in live action on Scarlett Johansson was one of the many difficult VFX challenges on *Ghost in the Shell*.

through New Port City were dubbed "ghost cams."

"Guillaume Rocheron used Google Maps to create a rough version of the camera going through Hong Kong," says Bonami. "Originally, the idea was to have drone footage, but it didn't work out because of Hong Kong regulations. A team spent nights going up onto rooftops and taking photographic footage along the path the camera would travel."

Miniatures were made of monolithic buildings that were turned into CG versions. "We put in many 3D props," says Bonami. "Once everyone was happy with the camera move, Rupert and Guillaume decided where to put the storytelling solograms. Then we could start putting in the secondary ones as well as directing crowds, cars, highways and street signage."

Unlike the Major (Johansson), Kuze, played by Michael Pitt, is viewed to be a failed robotic experiment.

"Rupert had us strip the design down in order to see more of the internals, muscles and skeleton, so to emphasize that Kuze mirrors Scarlett's character," says Bonami. "Most of Michael Pitt was replaced, but we kept his eyes, lips and the subtleness of his expression."

Clockwork mechanisms are revealed beneath the shell encasement.

"We cheated the lighting of the skeletons by adding some subtle rim lighting," Bonami says. "Guillaume brought the skeleton prop (created by Weta Workshop) on set, so we had a lighting refer-

ence. The prop muscles were too much like clear plastic, so we added a Gummy Bear feel to make them look more organic."

Anime Expectations

Living up to the anime was another challenge, especially for some of the best-known scenes. "The shelling sequence is one of the most iconic sequences from the anime so there was no pressure at all!" Bonami says with a laugh. "We wanted to add a photorealistic look to it. Everything was shot with the skeleton prop, which was replaced with a CG version for camera moves and reframing. There are still a few shots with the practical skeleton. We studied with Rupert the color balance for the scene. When she comes out of the white liquid, we used practical and CG shots."

The fluid simulations were complicated by having to match the live-action footage. "The previs gave us a good reference, but we wanted to have skin scatter and look slightly transparent as well as to get the right elevation towards camera, so that framing worked with all of the shots," he says.

In another key sequence, Major leaps off of a high-rise building. "We had great reference of a stunt person wearing the thermoptic suit jumping off of the roof," says Bonami, who had to make the invisible Major visible for the viewer. "The thermoptic suit doesn't always work well, so that is when the high-tech outfit reveals how it works. However, you still have





Axel Bonami

something quite gracious selling the idea that it's a moving invisible shape."

Weta Workshop practically made a thermoptic suit out of silicone, which was replaced with a CG version. "There were too many unwanted folds or segments of suit were bulging and creating some unflattering shapes," says Bonami. "Also, we had to add some iridescence. Then Rupert asked us to make the suit even thinner so to have it as a second skin."

Invisible Fighting

Capturing Major in action was often tricky, as in a courtyard fight that takes place in front of a CG cityscape and another in a shallow pool of water.

"We knew that the Major was going to be mostly invisible," says Bonami. "We did have




shots of a stunt person doing kicks and punches, which we used as our basis for the animation. We used some of the water interaction coming from the fight and, on top of that, there were additional simulations for the limbs to create those water arcs. We had an animation blocking stage that utilized a rig of tubes to produce the positioning and physics of what we wanted the arc to do, which were passed on to the effects team to simulate."

A small gimbal section was made for the top of the spider tank to serve as an interactive element with Johansson.

"The tank is remotely driven by Cutter (Peter Ferdinando), who is situated in a holographic control room," says Bonami. "We wanted to in-

troduce the fact that the Major is going to win because she's smarter. Even though we wanted to have all of this motion it was important that the tank still feel constrained."

The Major hacks into the memory of robot geisha, resulting in an abstract scene where people are not recalled in their entirety and deteriorate over time.

"Guillaume knew where all of these characters would be sitting so they were specifically lit for the environment," Bonami says. "*Ghost in the Shell* was quite a challenge, as we wanted to make sure that everything was going to work, look beautiful and please everyone. I am personally looking forward to the shelling sequence because I like the beauty of it." 

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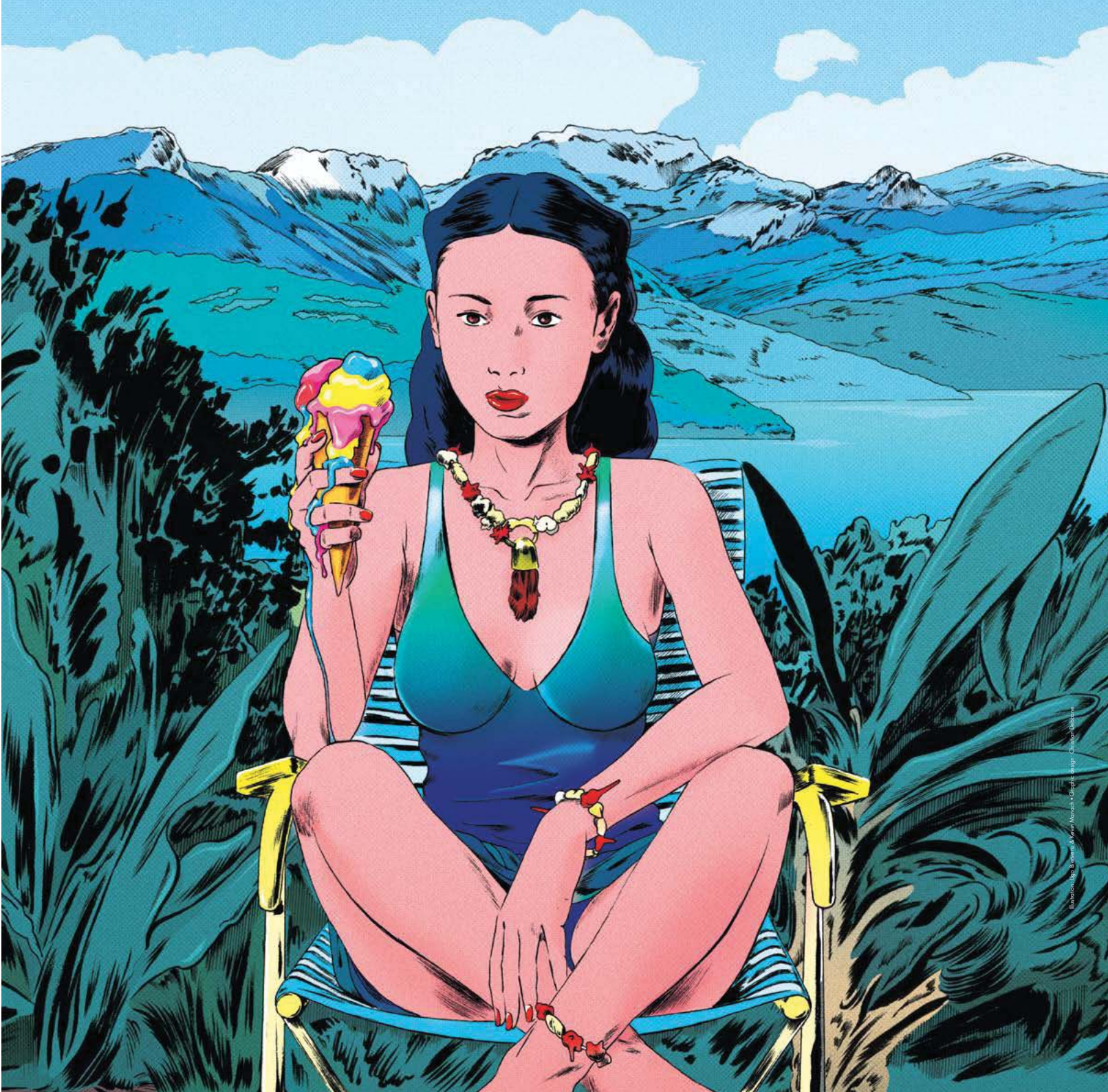
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Crash Course

Amazing cars, exotic locales and refined VFX work on a super tight schedule help *The Fate of the Furious* raise the bar for the long-lived franchise. By Karen Idelson.

Known for its distillation of stunts, car crashes, visual effects and CG work, the *Fast & Furious* franchise stands apart in its commitment to giving the audience exactly what it wants in two-year intervals. With a steady stream of exotic locations and A-list appearances, *The Fate of the Furious* marks the eighth installment in a series inclined to attract and maintain the sort of cult following that makes just about each one of these films a guaranteed money maker. And the visual effects in *F8* don't disappoint, thanks to visual effects supervisors Kelvin McIlwain and Michael J. Wassel.

Because of the tight production schedule, varied and far-flung location shoots and high volume of visual effects shots, *The Fate of the Furious* had two VFX supes overseeing all the aspects of preproduction, production and post. The film faced significant production challenges when it went to Cuba for the opening sequence, since it was one of the first films to come into the nation once President Barack Obama re-established diplomatic relations with the country. In Iceland – where a large quantity of costly cars had to be shipped for a big sequence – the production was sometimes shut down because of winds so strong they literally

lift the paving off of the country's roads.

Both McIlwain and Wassel know their way around the set on these franchises. They've been there for several films in the series and they get that audiences will arrive hungry for something they haven't seen before.

Both supes aim to create visual effects that read as realistic as they can by shooting and choreographing as much of the action in camera as possible before adding or fixing things in post.

"With every one of these films, we wreck all kinds of cars because recreating the physics of a car crash is incredibly difficult," says Wassel. "You're talking about everything from the angle at which the cars crash, to the speed and the lighting, and the eye knows when something doesn't feel right, so even if we intend to do it all digitally later, we want the information we get by capturing it all on set because you need the lighting, the way the pieces of the cars fall apart, everything."

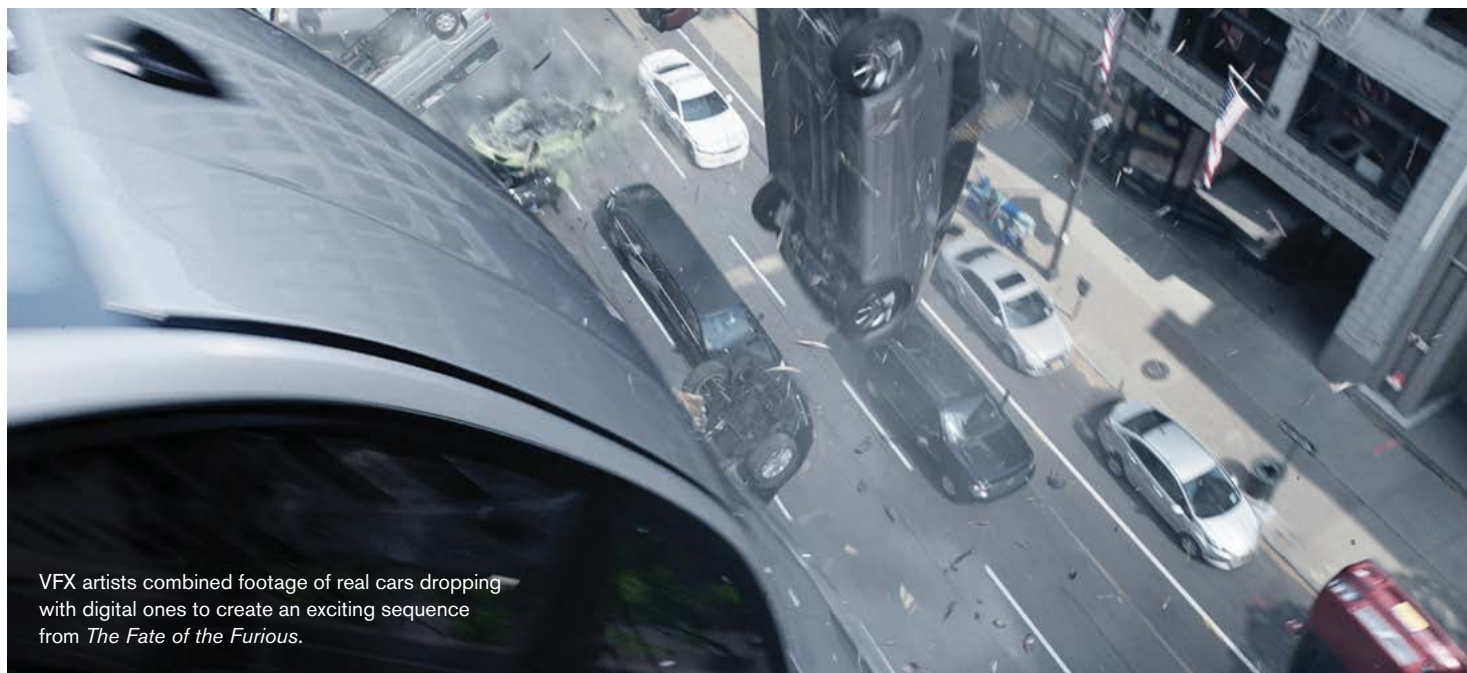
The supes both laud Spiro Razatos, second-unit director, for getting the kind of car footage that earned these films a reputation for great chase sequences. Razatos is known as a master of filming high-speed chases that show off the cars in all their glory.

Driving on Ice

While the film is populated with complex VFX shots, one of the more difficult sequences took place in Iceland, where much of the third act of the movie is staged. There, high-end cars had to be driven on ice as part of a series of chases that take Vin Diesel's team to the ends of the Earth. And on top of those shots, there were also involved progressions with ice, snow and water, as the cars and a submarine played a game of cat and mouse.

"All the different types of ice and snow made it especially difficult," says McIlwain. "Getting the look of them correct when there are different types of light on them and as a submarine is crashing through them or cars are driving across the snow and ice was incredibly hard. We've all seen snow and ice, so you're dealing with those expectations, too."

While Wassel was on set in Iceland, he needed to create roads on the ice so the hero cars could be driven for their beauty shots. The window of time when the ice was hard enough and thick enough to hold the cars was already narrow. The shoot also had to contend with the kind of weather that could easily turn lethal for a crew moving large vehicles around on the ice.



VFX artists combined footage of real cars dropping with digital ones to create an exciting sequence from *The Fate of the Furious*.

"Yeah, there were some days when we just realized the production was going to be shut down because if we went outside in all of that wind, it was going to be bad – very, very bad," says Wassel, a veteran of *The Fast and the Furious*, *Fast Five* and *Furious 7*.

Window Shots

Although not as exotic or unusual as Iceland, Cleveland played a significant role in *F8* by subbing for New York, where filming is pretty difficult if you want to stage a high-speed chase with a half dozen high-powered cars. Over the course of three weeks, crews used city streets and pushed cars out of windows for one of the more memorable sequences in the film.

This time again, the secret sauce was a mix-

ture of real cars being pushed out of the windows of a building in addition to CG cars based on the information gained by shooting the real ones falling.

"There were some cars that were weighted to fall a certain way to get a specific look to the fall, and there were others that we adjusted for other kinds of impacts," says McIlwain. "A tremendous amount of thought and planning goes into destroying the cars, but not all of them are just thrown away at the end, since it makes more sense to recycle or reuse them when you can, even if it means having to fix them up a bit after you've tossed them around."

In one of the more chilling scenes, Cipher, the film's cyber villain, unleashes a squad of self-driving cars that have been hacked. The filmmakers refined this plot point before fears

of actual hacking into car computer systems became part of the headlines, and now it seems almost prescient. Here the cars were both real and digital again and shot on the streets of Cleveland without any of the A-list cast on set. Later on, the VFX team merged the footage of the cars and the actors to bring together the edgy series of events.

"It's really all about imagining something fun that will make it worthwhile for the people who come to see these movies so they keep coming back to see them when a new one is made," says Wassel. ▀

Karen Idelson is an entertainment technology writer whose dog wasn't too happy about staying inside while she wrote this article.





Down to Earth

The genre-pushing storyline of *Logan* required visual effects that created a gritty, realistic take on a violent character and unforgiving world. By Karen Idelson.

We've all gone to a superhero film looking for the kind of visual effects that leave an audience wide-eyed and open-mouthed, completely stunned out of the ability to crunch down on the popcorn floating around between your teeth and tongue. But not every superhero takes this kind of glossy journey, and many modern warriors appear on screen more often with a dirty face than a bright cape flapping in the wind. Enter *Logan* and the kinds of visual effects that make us believe in his gritty, tortured journey.

In Hugh Jackman's final take on Wolverine, the character that launched him to stardom, we see more of the kinds of characters who lived in classic Westerns and Samurai films. Despite his powers, Logan has turned in on himself and is unable to escape his fate.

With that in mind, visual-effects supervisor Chas Jarrett set about creating believable, earthy-looking images that fit in with the vision of director James Mangold, who also helmed *The Wolverine* in 2013.

Though there were mostly more subtle visual effects in the film, along with the more stand-out big effects shots, there was no shortage of work for the effects teams. Jarrett

oversaw about 1,100 visual-effects shots done by houses such as Image Engine, Lola, Rising Sun, Soho VFX and an in-house team. The story, created by Mangold and written by the director along with Scott Frank (*The Wolverine*) and Michael Green (*Green Lantern*), leaned into the mythology of Jackman's character while still taking it to a new place. That meant specific things to Jarrett.

Logan is full of complex stunts done by a host of talented doubles, so Jarrett, who won a VES Award for his work on *Sherlock Holmes*, knew replacing the heads of the stuntmen with the head of Jackman was going to take careful planning and great technique. Two primary stuntmen – Eddie Davenport and Daniel Stevens – played Jackman's characters.

Assembling 'Logan's Run'

Near the end of the film, there are a series of shots where Logan is running through the forest to kill some attacking villains. Nicknamed "Logan's run" during the production, the sequence is a kind of masterclass on the use of stunts, digital claws, background replacement and fixes, all of which are also peppered with CG blood and guts.

"It was a big deal for us from the beginning,"

says Jarrett, who explains that the head of Jackman had to be altered to fit each stuntman. "We had to match the dimensions of each stunt double with the dimensions of Hugh's head, which is tricky because the smallest thing can make it look wrong to the audience when they're watching it, and then they're suddenly not believing what's happening."

Visual-effects artists began compositing the sequence on set to make sure all the elements – both practical in-camera work and digital items – were coming together in the way they had envisioned. That process went on for nearly 9 months, until the film was completed. Through the course of the sequence, Jackman transitions from being mostly himself to stunt doubles to a fully digital version of himself through the combined work of the stunt actors, visual-effects artists and dozens of other artisans.

The work was complicated since it was shot on location without motion control and with variable lighting and other uncontrollable elements in play for the cast and crew to handle. On screen, the entire sequence seems to flash by for Jarrett.

"I remember seeing it all put together and how fast it passed by and I just thought, 'Oh,



Dafne Keen, Hugh Jackman and director James Mangold prepare for a scene in *Logan*, above. At left, Jackman's Logan protects Keen's X-23.

there goes six months of my life,” says Jarrett, with a laugh.

There were similar replacements done for the Laura character played by Dafne Keen and the stuntwomen who doubled her on screen. Complex scans were done of Keen and each stunt performer so that they could match the images in action sequences so that they could become as believable as possible. As time-consuming as the process can be, you can't argue with the results. Early effects to do facial, head and neck replacement done in films like *Titanic* yielded mixed results at best. Since then, the process has become more refined and filmmakers have learned from past attempts to create this illusion.

“What I found was that we'd solved most of the technological issues, really,” says Jarrett. “But what we really needed was lots and lots of time to noodle with our shots because we're used to seeing faces and we know what they should look like. And then, if you're dealing with Hugh's face, then you've got all that baggage on top of that as well, so you're going to have to spend time with lighting and other things to bring the face to the point where it looks real to the audience, and their preconceived ideas about how Hugh should look play into all of that.”

Time Management

Visual-effects artist often had to work through the details, making subtle and even unexpected tweaks that make the replacements seamless. For Jarrett, who was on the

film for about 15 months, time and craft became key.

Jarrett, who is also a veteran of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, credits Mangold with giving the film its unique look and imagining visual effects that worked with a pared-down – while still imaginative look – for *Logan*. Mangold himself has mentioned the visual reference points of films such as *The Wrestler* and classic films such as *Shane*, *The Cowboys* and *The Gauntlet* when designing his approach to the story.

“I learned an awful lot from Jim (Mangold) in

terms of action and storytelling,” says Jarrett. “Developing the scene where there was a chase to the train was just a really fun sequence to work on and Jim's ideas about how (Logan) shouldn't just crash through the fence and everything (Logan) does goes wrong and he has to think of another way to do things, that's essentially every beat of the scene. He always wanted to find a way to make it more fun and more about the character.”

Karen Idelson is an entertainment technology writer and former visual-effects artist who lives in the South Bay.



Insider Comedy

Arriving on Blu-ray, the irreverent *Martian Successor Nadesico* gets funnier the more you know about the anime conventions it's making fun of. By Charles Solomon.

Martian Successor Nadesico: The Complete Collection

Nozomi: \$64.99 (5 discs, Blu-ray)

When *Martian Successor Nadesico* debuted in 1996, some otaku felt dissed by its irreverent spoofing of fan culture and animated sci-fi series (especially Hideaki Anno's epic *Neon Genesis Evangelion*). But the satire was too good-natured and too funny for anyone to stay angry, and it quickly became a fan favorite in both Japan and the United States. Twenty years later, it's still a textbook example of the take-no-prisoners insanity at which anime often excels.

In 2195, the mysterious "Jovian Lizards" are attacking Earth after capturing Mars and the moon. Fed up with the inept United Space Force, Nergal Heavy Industries constructs a battleship of unprecedented power, the *Nadesico*. Like many ships in science-fiction series, the *Nadesico* boasts an impressive array of high-tech weapons. But neither the U.S.S. *Enterprise* nor the Death Star offered vending machines (with recycling bins for the empty cans), futons and crew jackets.

To staff their state-of-the-art vessel, Nergal chooses "top people who may have slight personality problems" (to put it mildly). Commanding the *Nadesico* is scatter-brained Captain Yurika Misumaru (Jennifer K. Earhart), who nurtures a passionate but unreciprocated crush on Akito Tenkawa (Spike Spencer, parodying his performance as Shinji, the neurotic hero of *Evangelion*). Akito was traumatized by the slaughter he witnessed as a child on Mars when the Jovians attacked. He doesn't remember how – or if – he teleported from Mars during the at-

tack. He only recalls waking up on Earth.

Rounding out the crew of this ship of foolishness are sardonic science officer/child prodigy Ruri Hoshino (Kira Vincent-Davis), dirty old man/mechanic Seiya Uribatake (John Swasey) and voice actress/communications officer Megumi Reinard (Jenni Strader), once the star of *Natural Princess Magical Lychee*, a spoof of *Sailor Moon*.

Akito signs on to the *Nadesico* as a cook, but he's drafted as a pilot for the Aestivalis, a Gundam-style mechanical suit. Although he turns out to be an ace mecha pilot, Akito wants no part of it – until he meets irrepressible Jiro Yamada (Brett Weaver), who's adopted the more dashing moniker of Gai Daigoji. (His real name is the Japanese equivalent of Joe Smith.) Gai worships *Gekiganger 3*, a hilarious send-up of old giant robot series like *Gigantor* and *Voltron*, and uses the characters' heroism to inspire Akito to charge into battle.

Internal Loop

Director Tatsuo Sat and his crew include clips from *Gekiganger* that mimic the disco-beat theme song, Xeroxed lines and hammy voice acting that typified the style. Akito becomes a rabid fan, and his "solid metal casting limited edition collector's *Gekiganger 3*" becomes his most valued possession. The story reaches rare heights of absurdity when characters in *Nadesico* and *Gekiganger 3* watch each other's programs, pointing out shortcom-

ings. When dashing *Gekiganger* pilot Ken complains that the week's *Nadesico* episode is just a clip show, the inevitable half-pint sidekick sniffs, "Don't you know, they always do this in the middle of animated series, so new viewers will know what's happening!" Pilot Joe scoffs, "I'll bet the studio was running behind schedule and they needed a quick filler episode."

The action and the vocal performances are often pitched at a hysterical pace, so *Nadesico* is best watched an episode or two at time, or it can become wearying. Many threads of the plot



are left hanging at the end of the last episode; Ruri suggests that some of them will be sorted out "in the inevitable sequel."

The storyline of *Nadesico* probably couldn't have sustained a sequel, but Sat and many of the original artists produced a follow-up theatrical feature subtitled *Prince of Darkness* in 1998. Sadly, *Prince of Darkness* lacks the irreverent humor that made the series beloved.

That same year, the filmmakers released a 30-minute *Gekiganger 3* OVA, which is included in the Blu-ray set, but in Japanese only. Akito, Yurika, Megumi and Ruri attend the opening of the *Gekiganger* theatrical feature, which consists of the clips from *Nadesico* plus new material. This choppy sequence of short scenes pushes the parody even further, poking fun at every genre cliché from the super-special alloy "Gekigangium" to the fallen hero's inspirational visit from beyond the grave.

Martian Successor Nadesico belongs in the library of every anime fan, and the more the viewer knows about Japanese animation, the funnier it is. ☞



Making Waves

Studio Ghibli's little-seen *Ocean Waves*, *Tangled: Before Ever After*, *Sailor Moon R: The Movie* and a *Monchhichi* flashback head a youthful month for home entertainment. By Mercedes Milligan.

Ocean Waves

[GKIDS, \$19.99]

Back in December, GKIDS gave anime enthusiasts a rare chance to catch this undercirculated Studio Ghibli title by releasing a new 4K restoration in theaters.

Now, the 1993 TV movie can be yours to enjoy at your leisure. The poignant story of teenage isolation was directed by Tomomi Mochizuki (*Princess Nine*, *Ranma 1/2*, *Maison Ikkoku*), leading a team of young Ghibli artists.

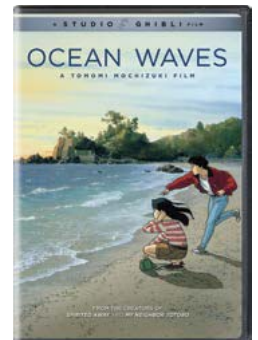
Adapted from the best-selling novel by Saeko Himuro, the story revolves around Taku and Yutaka, whose friendship is tested by the arrival of a beautiful and moody transfer student named Rikako.

When Taku joins Rikako on a trip back to Tokyo, an eruption of rumors force the three friends to come to terms

with their changing relationships.

The home release presents the film in its original Japanese with English subtitles, augmented with a "Looking Back: A Staff Reunion" featurette that gathers the creators 11 years on. The Blu-ray Combo Pack (\$24.99) tacks on an exclusive storyboards feature. *Ocean Waves* is just as picturesque, deep and complex as its namesake.

[Release date: April 18]



Tangled: Before Ever After

[Disney, \$19.99]

An all-new animated series following *Tangled*'s Rapunzel has kicked off on Disney Channel, and now you can jump into the colorful 2D continuation with the introductory TV movie.

Set between the film and the series, the movie follows the "barefoot princess" as she sets out to experience the

wide world.

With the help of her true love, Eugene, Pascal the chameleon and Maximus the horse, and a daring lady-in-waiting named Cassandra, Rapunzel postpones her wedding and royal duties to explore life beyond Corona's walls.

Exec produced by Chris Sonnenburg (*Enchanted*), *Before Ever After*

features the voices of Mandy Moore as Rapunzel, Zachary Levi as Eugene, Eden Espinosa as Cassandra, Julie Bowen as Queen Arianna and Clancy Brown as King Frederic. The movie also boasts music from Alan Menken. The DVD includes four animated "Tangled Short Cuts": *Checkmate*, *Prison Bake*, *Make Me Smile* and *Hare Peace*.

[Release date: April 11]



Sailor Moon R: The Movie

[VIZ, \$19.98]

Toei Animation's first feature inspired by Naoko Takeuchi's classic manga is returning to shelves, on the heels of its North American theatrical premiere ... 20-plus years after its initial Japanese debut.

Now with a fresh English dub starring

Stephanie Sheh (Usagi/Sailor Moon), Robbie Daymond (Mamoru Chiba/Tuxedo Mask) and Ben Diskin (Fiore), the movie introduces a figure from Mamoru's past who returns with a well meant but very dangerous gift, putting the Earth in danger.

The standard edition DVD includes the original 1993 theatrical short *Make Up! Sailor Guardians!*, which finds Usagi and Chibiusa eavesdropping on a

cafe conversation between Sailor Senshi fans. The Blu-ray combo set (\$29.98) also includes voice cast interviews, the L.A. premiere event Q&A, and more. Both versions feature uncut English dub and original Japanese versions for the planet-powered experience of your choice.

[Release date: April 18]



Monchhichis: The Complete Series

[Warner, \$24.99]

Topping our totally retro wish list this month is this print-to-order *Hanna-Barbera Classic Collection* release, with all 13 episodes of the 1983 cartoon on two discs.

Based on the fad toys created by Yoshiharu Washino, the show originally aired on ABC as part of a combo with

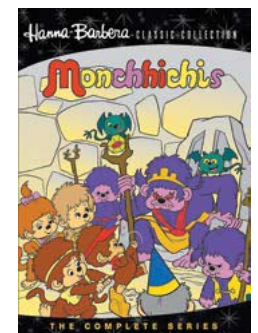
Little Rascals and *Richie Rich*, and ticks all the 1980s toy boxes: Friendship, magic, arbitrary headbands, and a theme song guaranteed to drive any adult crazy.

In the series, the monkey-like Monchhichis live peacefully in the treetop community of Monchia, but they are constantly under threat from the wicked Horgg (voiced by screen legend Sidney Miller) and his colony of Grump-

lins who live below. Luckily, Moncho (Robert Morse), Patchitt (Frank Welker), Tootoo (Ellen Berstell), Kyla (Laurel Page) and the rest are always able to outwit their enemies with the help of wise wizard Wizzar (Frank Nelson).

This is the perfect excuse to stay in your jammies all morning with a big bowl of cereal. Especially if you live in Oregon or Colorado ...

[Release date: April 18]



Honorable Mentions:

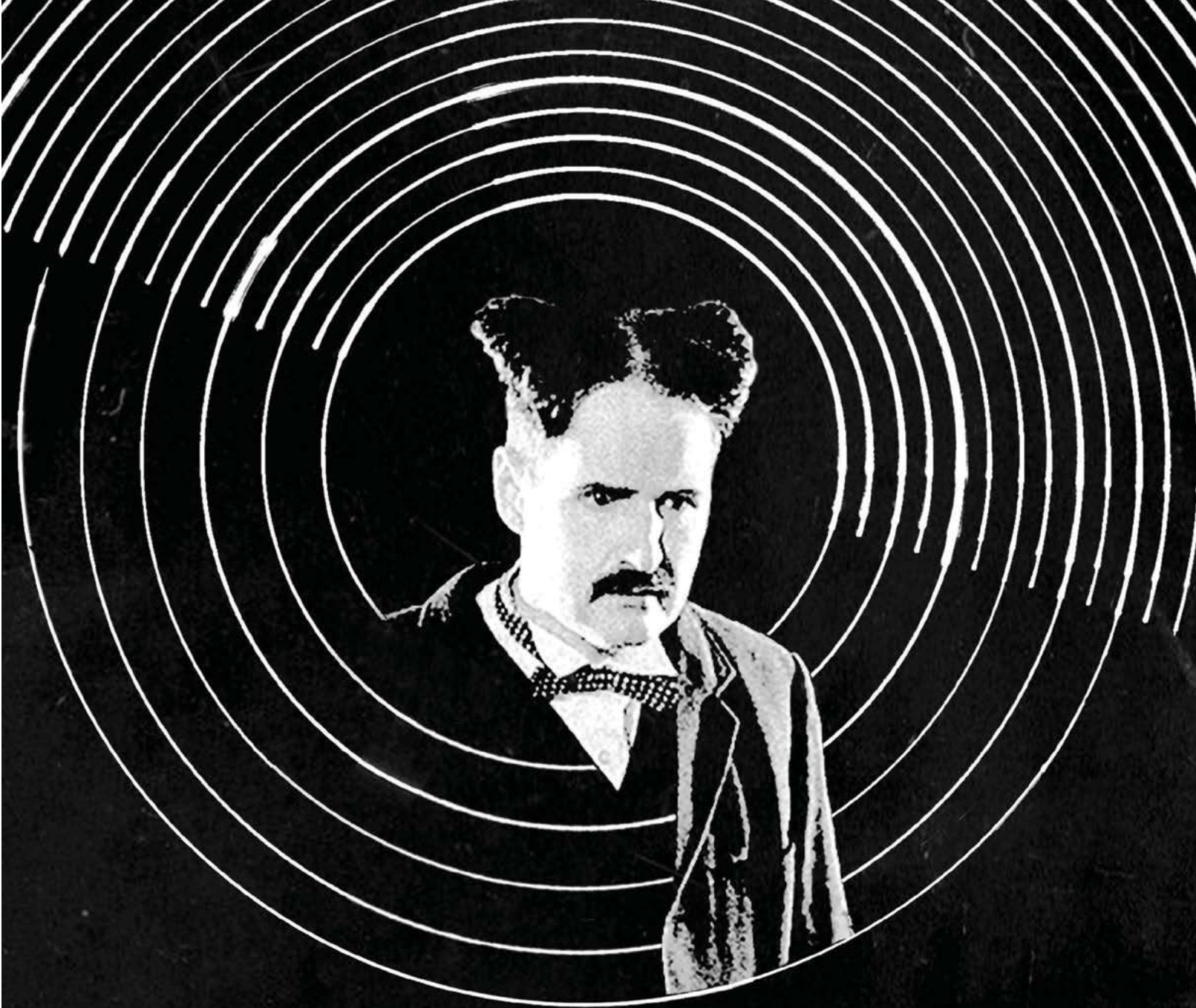
Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir - It's Ladybug!
April 11 [Shout!, \$15]

One Punch Man: Season 1
April 25 [VIZ, LE BD \$60]

Peanuts by Schulz: Go Team Go!
April 25 [Warner, \$19]

Pound Puppies: Lucky Time
April 18 [Shout!, \$13]

Rogue One: A Star Wars Story
April 4 | April 24 [Disney, DVD \$18, BD \$40 | LE BD \$59]



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